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BY

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CHAPTER I.

GOSSIPS.

'ONE thing I can say for myself, and defy contradiction, Mrs. Nowse:—Ben would never have been where he is now but for me. I may do myself that justice, I think. It is not much.'

'You have been a true sister to him, Miss Phœbe, and no doubt he feels it as he should.'

'Perhaps he does—perhaps he does not. That is neither here nor there. Ben is good enough in his way. And if I did set my face against his getting married at two-and-twenty, it was no more than common prudence. I can tell

any one who wishes to know that my conscience has never reproached me for a moment—not for a moment, Mrs. Nowse. It would have been madness. They were both too young—much.' Miss Phœbe's voice hardened as she delivered these sentences, but she drew a long breath at the end of them, and regarded Mrs. Nowse with anxious visage.

That excellent person desired to be kind, but her shrewdness was rarely at fault in seeing through the pretences of her friends. Miss Phœbe protested too much to be quite at ease; and her sudden, inconsequent bringing up of an old vexation confessed as plainly as if she had said so, that some new trouble was looming on her horizon, which her rational mind interpreted as an evolution of circumstance inseparably linked with the past.

'I remember that you were very strong in your own opinion at the time, and you believed yourself to be acting for the best, Miss Phœbe,' said her neighbour—who knew that she had been both wilful and selfish in that business.

'I did, Mrs. Nowse. And I believe it is for

the best yet. She had nothing. And Ben had nothing—'

'He had his talents, Miss Phœbe. And Mr. Lowther had not much besides his talents then—'

'Ben had his talents, it is true, and he was industrious; but he had not the family and friends Mr. Lowther had to give him a start. Nobody knew us when we came to London. Ben had his way to make—and I put it to you, Mrs. Nowse, candidly: Would he have got on as he has without me to help him, and encourage him?'

'You deserve every credit for your devotion and carefulness, Miss Phœbe—'

'Indeed I do!' interrupted the maiden-lady with tremulous insistence. 'Ben has never had to take thought for the morrow any more than the sparrow on the house-top. He has only had to work and amuse himself. I have been a deal better to him than an airified, extravagant wife, who would always have wanted to be flaunting about, going to her operas and dinner-parties, and driving in the park. I have no

opinion of such ways—and with four children! How they uphold the expense is the miracle. But as I tell Ben, when we hear how they are launching out,—where there is neither providence nor foresight in a household, sooner or later, difficulties are sure to come.' Miss Phœbe did not prophesy in a mournful spirit. Quite the contrary. She concluded in accents of resigned anticipation, as if difficulties in the household under question would enjoy the sanction of her deliberate judgment whenever they arrived.

Mrs. Nowse, by the inarticulate sound she emitted, seemed to demur.

Miss Phœbe promptly rejoined: 'Wait, and you will see. Then say, if you can, that it would have been best to let Ben marry her.' Her tone was harder than before, her complexion was heightened, and her temper rising.

Mrs. Nowse sat silent for a minute, and then with quiet reflectiveness, she said: 'Mrs. Lowther is a nice woman. Mr. Lowther must be making a large income, and I never heard that he had any of the private tastes that cost

so much. He is very much liked in his profession.'

'He toils like a slave at his profession. But there is a limit to everything—even to the largest income. If anything happened to him, where would they be? He had no money with his wife—that is positive. And he makes a perfect idol of her. Nothing that woman fancies is denied her—and the children dressed for all the world like little pictures out of the fashion-book.'

'I dare say she has a sewing machine, and makes their pretty costumes herself—many ladies do. And I have been told she keeps her husband's books. He does not look like a man with worries at home.'

'I don't care how he looks! She was not the girl I could ever have wished to see Ben's wife—' Miss Phœbe stopped short: she felt that she was committing herself. Her eyes filled up with tears. Mrs. Nowse understood that there was bad news to follow, and hummed in sympathy. 'If I could have guessed what was to befal him now, I might as well have let

him marry her, and have done with it,' stammered the distressed sister amidst gusty sobs.

'I always thought it a pity you did not. Ben would have done very well—and she did love him—'

'Nonsense! Love him? She was just singed, that was all, like other geese before cooking, as I have heard my dear mother say. She accepted Mr. Lowther at the first word. Which showed her sense—though Ben did not like it—poor fellow!' Miss Phœbe dried her eyes, and strove to be composed again. She was engaged in knitting a very large garment of indefinite shape. The material was white Brittany wool. Mrs. Nowse watched the swift motion of the needles for some minutes, waiting in silent patience for what next. Three times the knitter spread forth her web, and contemplated its slow development, before her voice was steady enough to speak again: a very grimy web it was, as white knitting, long in progress, may soon become in London smoke.

'I wonder whether Ben will find his young

wife ready to knit his vests for him, and to wash them with her own hands, as I've done, Mrs. Nowse;' by-and-by the pensive Penelope resumed. 'They never go to the laundress. In lukewarm water and a nice lather everyweek do I wash them myself. And why? Because I cannot endure to see good flannels spoilt—and more especially flannels that I have spent my own time and labour in knitting.' She looked at Mrs. Nowse and sighed abstractedly—talking of one thing, and thinking of another—all her mind wrapped in her still uncommunicated woe. Mrs. Nowse grew quite alert and interested.

'Ben's young wife!' whispered she, like a surprised and pleasant echo—'What, Miss Phoebe, is Ben going a-courting? Dear Ben! Well, I wish him luck, that I do; for he was always a good fellow!'

'H'm! That is all the consideration there will be for me, who have had the charge of him from a baby,' said Miss Phœbe, huffed by her gossip's gaiety, and saddened by the pathetic representation she made to herself of her own case. 'There it is. His sister has had all the

care and anxiety of bringing him up and establishing him in the world, and now the worst is over, let her retire, and make room for a young wife to come and enjoy his ease and prosperity. But the young wife is not caught yet. Ben need not make too sure of her. Girls are girls—'

'Who is she?' asked Mrs. Nowse, curiosity superseding patience at last.

Miss Phœbe laid down her knitting, stirred the fire into a blaze, clasped her hands in her lap, and came to the point with an effort. 'You have never seen her, Mrs. Nowse, but it is little Pattie Gardner. I have not seen her myself since she was nine years old, and what she may be like I cannot tell you—but Ben fancies her. He has gone down into Yorkshire every year, more or less, so they are not strangers. I feel comfortable in talking to you, Mrs. Nowse, because you have known us from the beginning; and you will not mention it again. It may end in moonshine—but she is coming to pay us a visit. It seems like asking her to walk into a trap; for Ben, looking as silly as you please,

told me she has not a notion of what he wants. A mere child she is to him—not eighteen till next October.'

Mrs. Nowse's countenance was expressive of genial approbation. 'Oh, it is time Ben married unless he proposes to be an old bachelor, and if he fancies her, and she fancies him, it will be all right. Eighteen is a very good age for a girl, when a man is near thirty. What will Mrs. Lowther say to her?'

'I don't know. But you may be sure Ben will not rest until he knows. That woman's opinion carries it over everybody else's with him yet—'

'Ah, Miss Phœbe, don't be jealous of her any longer—she has been a sincere friend to both of you,' Mrs. Nowse said, in a tone of gentle remonstrance that turned Miss Phœbe's thoughts into a retrospective channel.

She reached out her hand and took back her knitting, saying, 'I do not deny it—I do not deny it.' And then there was a silence, unbroken for at least ten minutes.

If Miss Phœbe had formulated her under-

lying feelings just then, they might have been called selfish. But they were perfectly natural. —'What is to be done with me? Where am I to go when Ben brings home his wife? I have nothing. I can do nothing but be somebody's housekeeper, as I have been his. I may have to take a situation—at my age, to be a servant, after being a mistress all my life.'—This was the muddy current that troubled the usually clear course of Miss Phœbe's meditations, as her needles clicked to and fro.

'And when does Miss Pattie arrive?' was the inquiry with which Mrs. Nowse interrupted it.

'To-morrow afternoon, about four o'clock,' answered Miss Phœbe, her mouth quivering again. She threw down her knitting, and jumped up, vexed at her weakness, and tried to put it off. 'Come and see the room we have got ready for her,' she said, motioning to her gossip impatiently.

'Is not it the spare room that you keep always ready, then?' Mrs. Nowse asked, following up the stairs.

'No. No; Ben would not have it. She is

but a young creature, and in the country it is so easy to have things white and sweet. It is the little sitting-room. Ben chose the chintz—pale buff—and all over dicky-birds and honeysuckle.' Miss Phœbe sounded almost herself again, displaying this new-built nest.

'Very pretty, indeed, very pretty! Ah, you'll make a pet of her, Miss Phœbe, mind if you don't,' Mrs. Nowse said with a meaning nod.

'I can't promise. That depends on what she is.' Miss Phœbe bit her lip hard, and looked at her friend.

Mrs. Nowse understood what her face said, and was sorry. She laid a hand on her shoulder, and. spoke cheerily. 'Come, come, don't fret, don't be solicitous about the future. If Ben will marry, let him—then you will have two to care for instead of one.'

Miss Phœbe was ashamed to say: 'Who will care for me?' but she thought it.

On the way back to the drawing room, Mrs. Nowse stood a minute on the landing to admire the contents of a small corner-cupboard in

carved oak, the doors of which were set open. It was full of fine Chelsea ware, blue and white.

'You have made every inch of your old house amusing, Miss Phœbe—queer old mansion that it is! I suppose these knicknackeries are your property?' said the visitor.

'Not they! Everything you see was bought with Ben's money. I have shared the pleasure of collecting them, that is all. My private possessions would go into a single box.' Miss Phœbe avowed her poverty without shame.

Mrs. Nowse was sorry and rather surprised: 'That is the worst of sisterly service—you are not paid for it,' said she. 'You ought to have made yourself a little purse by this time, Miss Phœbe.'

'I never dreamed of such a thing—Oh, don't talk of it! I shall not need to beg. I am a useful body in a house, though I say it, and can turn a hand to most things at a pinch.'

'You should have had a house of your own by rights. It would have been a pattern.'

'What ails this house? It is a very sufficient house for us,' Miss Phœbe said, gazing round with quiet approval.

'It is so out of date.'

'I think that is why we like it. Ben likes it, and so do I. And the bit of garden is a continual feast.'

'Yes, there is the garden; but these high, old-fashioned wooden mantel-pieces with their carved medallions, all so quaint, and the wainscot, a third of the way up the wall. I prefer to appear a little more modern.'

'Oh, the fashion will come round to us again! What is this I hear about the Queen Anne style? Queen Anne has been dead these hundred and fifty years. And that is the date of our earliest title-deed. I will show it to you if you care to see such things? I am always interested in ancient domesticities.'

But Mrs. Nowse did not care for musty parchments, and was plain enough to say so. Miss Phœbe and she were next-door neighbours here in town; though Miss Phœbe's was a high-shouldered, little round-headed gable

house, and Mrs. Nowse's was a spacious suburban residence, stucco outside, and glass and gilding within. The reason the high-shouldered little house still held its place in the midst of a quite Victorian quarter, was that the Milners had got a long lease of it when it was a much cheaper quarter, and they loved it so well that nobody had been able to bribe them out of it.

CHAPTER II.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

'I WONDER why men always *will* go and have their hair cut the day before a party? You are cropped as if you had just come out of the house of correction, Ben,' was his sister's half-testy greeting as he came into her parlour for the few minutes before dinner that evening.

'No, no, Phœbe,' remonstrated he, and walked to a circular mirror on the wall opposite the window to verify her unflattering portraiture. The waving of the laburnums in the garden was reflected as a background to his dark hair. 'H'm, you are not far out, Phœbe; you have a discerning eye, ma'am. That fellow *does* clip close.'

Ben continued to inspect his image in the glass critically, until Miss Phœbe told him that

his curls would grow none the faster for watching; then he came over to the fire-side, observing that, May though it was, a spark in the grate looked comfortable; for the wind was in the east. 'Have you been out to-day?' he enquired.

Miss Phœbe had been into 'the Grove,' shopping, and had finished with a turn in Kensington Gardens before luncheon. 'I don't think the country anywhere can show a more beautiful sight than the Gardens when the chestnuts are coming out,' she said. 'Pattie Gardner will have to allow that.'

'She will be willing, ma'am. They were delightful in the sunshine when I walked across this afternoon,' said Ben; and then the door opened, and a buxom parlour-maid announced dinner.

When the brother and sister were sat down, and she was helping him to fish, she made one of those self-evident remarks which are the staple of interrupted familiar discourse. 'You have brought nobody home, Ben? You fell in with nobody, perhaps?'

'I fell in with Merryweather; but I remembered that this is the last evening we shall be by ourselves for a week or two, and I propose to enjoy it with yourself, ma'am. I'll trouble you for the cucumber, Mary Ann.'

'Very kind of you, Ben, I'm sure. Shall we go out somewhere?' Miss Phœbe seemed pleasingly touched.

'No, Phœbe; we'll stop at home, thank you. This salmon is excellent. Tell cook she shall have a diploma for salmon cutlets, Mary Ann. Don't forget.'

'No, sir.' Mary Ann averted her countenance to laugh at the side-board. To these amenities Miss Phœbe turned a deaf ear at the moment, but she often expressed in private a wish that Ben would not joke with the servants; to which Ben would rejoin, now with one wise sentence, and now with another.

'Good words are worth much, and cost little,' was his reply to her present disapproving nod, when Mary Ann had gone out to change the dishes. The remonstrance became verbal.

'How should Specks know what a diploma is? She will expect something solid.'

'Her reasonable expectations shall not be disappointed, ma'am. A prudent man keeps on friendly terms with the kitchen. New potatoes, Phœbe, go capitally with salmon. I'll take wine with you, my dear. Here's towards you. "Long may you live, and happy may you be."'

'What spirits you are in, Ben! what nonsense you talk, to be sure! Leave the cucumber, Mary Ann; your master likes it with roast steak.'

The meal progressed with ruminative satisfaction. After the roast steak followed a glass bowl of gooseberry fool—a permanent weakness with Ben.

'You cater for your grateful brother like a woman of sense, Phœbe. Don't quarrel with Specks on any account. A truly deserving woman.'

'Be quiet, Ben. Let Specks be. You will turn her head with conceit, and, in fact, she is only a very *plain* cook. If I tried to give you

fancy dishes, you would soon see. Do you want her to raise her wages, that you praise her so? Eighteen pounds I consider ample—*ample.*'

'May she continue to agree with you, ma'am. A most estimable creature, Phœbe; though, as you say, a *very* plain cook. But handsome is that handsome does, in that state of life.'

It was growing dusk when the brother and sister returned together to the sitting-room upstairs. The glow of the fire warmed and coloured it. 'I cannot think why Mr. Nowse never will admire my parlour, Ben. It is quite a picture to me as we come in,' Miss Phœbe said, with an affectionate look all round and about it.

It was a picture. A rather long room for its width, and high in the ceiling: painted in two delicate shades of sage green. Everything in it had the air of being used, treasured, and well cared for. Nothing was mean or pretentious or ugly. Above the wainscot there was not much wall visible: it was covered

with pictures, chiefly engravings, and all worth having. There were the lovely Frankland Sisters after Sir Joshua, and his pretty little Gipsy Fortune-teller; and there were Romney's beautiful ladies as the Morning and Evening Star—these were Ben's taste. And the old china was his sister's. The greater part of the collection they had brought with them from their early home in Yorkshire when that was broken up, but some majestic pieces of rich blue Miss Phœbe had discovered in curiosity-shops from time to time, when such acquisitions were to be made at less cost than now. The furniture fitted and suited its place, and answered its purpose. The writing-table had a gallery, open above and with convenient little drawers underneath. It was very comfortable to write at. There was one low book-case of three shelves, to which Miss Phœbe only admitted books in full dress—there might be some amongst them of which their outside was the best part. Above this, and opposite the deep recess of the window, was a gold-framed girandole of very graceful design, which made

a landscape with figures in the day-time, sunny or gloomy, varying with the weather and the seasons; and at night, with the curtains drawn, framed the square bay, red settees at either side, and Miss Phœbe's own place between the window and the fire, her peculiar table and shaded lamp, and usually Miss Phoebe herself—a sturdy provincial figure still, after a quarter of a century of London life.

That was what it framed now. After a few minutes of stirring about, Miss Phœbe settled herself for the remainder of the evening in her corner, and took up her knitting. Ben reclined at length in a chair that he much affected when he appeared to be idle, but really had on what his sister called his 'Thinking Cap.' He was watching her neat, precise movements with a kindly amusement—her homely, serious face, her compact form arrayed in black silk, its robust outlines softened with frills and ruffles of fine lace. Lace—that was another of Miss Phœbe's vanities—and she had some of great beauty and value, which never passed out of her own hands to wash or mend any more than

her brother's vests. Those precious vests! she always had one on the needles. Sometimes Ben pulled a needle out.

'Phibs, let the knitting be to-night. I want you to look at me,' he said with a lazy, masterful air.

'Very happy, Ben. I love to look at an agreeable object. Oh, I wish you had not had your hair cut to-day! You should have asked me. It did not want it.'

'Talk about old times, ma'am: tell me something that happened when you were a blooming young woman. The great event of your life was that I was born.'

'I never was blooming at any period of my life, Ben; I never had a colour to speak of more than yourself. As for my features, they have not altered. But I should have thought you would be for looking forward, rather than back.'

'Your nose was always a pretty nose, Phibs; nice and square and blunt. I remember when I liked that shape better than all

others. Pattie's has just the least turn in life towards the sky.'

'Ah, I expected we should come to Pattie's nose by-and-bye: only have patience. You have never really described her to me yet, Ben. Begin as if you were writing a chapter.'

'Pattie is not of heroic mould, Phibs; she's indescribable.'

'But surely you know what her eyes are like; and whether her hair is black, brown, or red.'

'It is a judicious mixture of all three. And her eyes are velvet.'

'H'm, velvet? Well, Ben, let us hope all will run smooth. You were my boy, you know, and I spoilt you dreadfully. I believe I do yet. You get whatever you want—such luck attends you. And if ever you have been denied, why there is your cake left to eat. If you had eaten it when you wanted so many years ago, you would not have had it now. You will have to take her to call on Mrs. Lowther yourself.'

Ben's ideas floated off into space. He heard

his sister's voice in a dream. A drowsiness stole over him—wrapt him in elysium. 'Dear Ben, he's tired. Let him have a little snooze,' said she, indulgently regarding him, as he lapsed deeper and deeper into unconsciousness. 'What a beautiful face he has when he's sleeping. I wonder how I ever can vex him!' she thought by-and-by. But it was not very often she vexed him.

These two were the eldest and youngest of a very large family. The intermediate brothers and sisters have nothing to do with the story. Miss Phœbe came when their parents were poor and striving, and some of the prejudices and habits of that period she never lost. She could not abide any manner of waste or extravagance. She had even a little stinginess or two, but a measured liberality was her rule. She was not well educated, and had no accomplishments. Neither did she care for a book. She took up a newspaper now and then, but her heart was in the details of her household management. She was shrewd, and possessed so much good sense, that though, by nature egotistical and

exacting, she tried hard to keep self under, and to form her manners on the model of the admirable mother, depicted in 'The Original' as the author's own. She had achieved to perfection the practice of having the supper-tray ready, out of sight, when her brother returned home late after a dinner-party; but she was not invariably able to conform to Mrs. Walker's beautiful discretion, in asking no questions until he gave her the cue by beginning to talk himself. But that might come.

Ben Milner was the last-born son of his mother, and she lived only three years after his birth. That was how he fell into his sister Phœbe's hands, and was called her boy. She kept her father's house after her mother's death, and ruled the whole family;—on the whole comfortably. Prosperity was then the order of the day, and care and struggle were over. Nothing was wanting to Ben that love, or peace, or money could find him in. He had his own way at home as the baby, but his nursing sister averred that he was such a good baby that his way was the right way ever. As a boy he

was not very objectionable. He had plenty of fun. He was capable of trimming pussy's whiskers, but he never did stick pins in her. At school he followed Polonius' advice, and was wary of entrance into a quarrel; but being in, he used his fists to such convincing purpose that rivals were mostly willing to take his arguments for granted. From school it was a question where he should go—whether to Oxford for more Greek, or to Liverpool to learn engineering, or to China to taste tea—the young man having talents, but a desultory mind. As his father had money, he had his way still, and entered at Worcester College. In the long vacation he travelled, and saw the world with fresh, young eyes.

But, of course, a man cannot live by seeing. And one day his father died. Mr. Milner had brought his other sons up to work, and had married all his daughters except Phœbe. He did not leave much behind him. The share of each was very small when it was divided. Phœbe and Ben resolved to cast in their lots together. Oxford was forsaken, and

to London they went: Ben to seek his fortune in the office of a mercantile cousin, and his sister to make a home for him. It was a bold beginning to take a house on their shoulders, but they thought it would pay. And it did pay. It stood alone in a garden, with one end towards a side-street, where was the neat door up two steps, with a brass knocker for visitors, and a bell for the servants. Towards the main road there was a court screened by a high-clipt hedge of lime-trees, and the garden at the back was similarly enclosed, but with a brick wall besides. The leaves were renewed every season, but the house kept getting browner and browner each year. The windows were polished to a nicety, draped inside with ever-clean net curtains, and garlanded outside for summer with westeria.

Miss Phœbe's portion, over and above the rest of her father's children, was whatever she liked to keep of the furniture and other chattels in the house. Not much was worth transport to London. It was too cumbrous for the old cottage Ben and she took together, but still

memorials enough were brought away to keep always before their eyes the remembrance of home. Miss Phœbe had told Mrs. Nowse that she was worth nothing in property; but she had forgotten the antiquated silver tea-service and the apostle spoons, and other valuables in a small way, and those fragilities in china out of her mother's cupboard which had quite enthusiastic admirers in these later days. One of her acquaintances had even said that she should like to run off with this and with that, to which Miss Phœbe had dryly rejoined: 'Perhaps you would. But you had better not.'

An episode of Ben Milner's romantic age has been alluded to. He was not fond of office-work; and by a stroke of fortune, he was able to change it very soon for an appointment in a public institution, where his gifts, taste and education had their natural play and development. This position suited him excellently. It gave him means enough, under his sister's judicious economy, to live without carefulness, and though there were periods when his duties pressed on him heavily, there were also frequent intervals

that left him at leisure with mind unjaded. The upshot of this was that Ben turned author. Miss Phœbe used to speak of his productions as pastime, and to tell her friends that he had really a very pretty knack of telling a story with his pen. It was evident that she rather looked down on this pretty knack, though it brought him friends that she liked, and money as well.

But we are getting on too fast. We are leaving out the 'ower true tale' of the poor lad's love for the lady who was now Mrs. Lowther. That incident befel about the time when he forsook commerce for literature, and when Miss Phœbe, while acquiescing in his right to please himself, openly regretted that he had thrown away noble prospects of advancement for the mere sake of being happy, working in his own way. Mary Halsted was her name, one of those womanly sweet women, whom good men rest in, and grow to love the more the longer they live together. Ben was not the victim of a bewildering passion, but he was intensely devoted; he coveted her for his wife

and companion dearly. And Mary inclined to him with a quite responsive tenderness. But Miss Phœbe nipt that blossom in the bud. She blew over the garden of Ben's hopes like a cold north wind. She felt acutely what she would lose herself if he took another housekeeper, and she set to work with all her might to hinder it. And she succeeded. She reminded Ben of what he owed her, and was not sparing of self-praise and self-pity. Ben was very young, grateful, of a considerate soul. His sister had over him the influence of affection, usefulness and habit. She had not sacrificed anything for him, but she had served him well. Ben thought they might all live in one house, and Mary would not have refused; but Miss Phœbe scouted the suggestion; she knew, she said contemptuously, where that would end. No, if Ben must marry before he had well cut his wisdom teeth, she should say he had thrown her over; she would go back to Yorkshire, and seek a situation among old friends who were to be better trusted.

Ben was in a cruel strait. He could not

use Phibs hardly. Mary's father refused to consent to an engagement unless with marriage in prospect. Mary suffered herself to be advised. She cried bitterly when Ben and she were forbidden to meet, but she was not made to pine in melancholy. Mr. Lowther had been standing by, envying Ben Milner's opportunities, but seeing no chance for a rival. When Ben took his dismissal, he put in for the prize himself. He was forbearing, but assiduously kind; and at the end of six months Mary married him. Everybody said she did wisely, and Miss Phœbe was betrayed by her jealous dislike into taunting Ben: 'There, you see! she cannot have cared very much for you, Ben, or she would not have let herself be so soon consoled.' Ben held his peace and went out. He never reproached his sister, but he would not hear her speak of Mary for a long while after.

The three families—Halsteds, Lowthers, Milners—had been on cordially intimate terms. They fell apart now, as was likely. But a time of trouble drew them together again. Ben Milner was brought home one day almost dead.

He had slipped in getting down from the omnibus on which he rode to his business, and got a hurt which the first surgeon he saw shook his head over, plainly implying that he feared it would be his death. Miss Phœbe rose to the occasion, spurned at the doctor, and declared that her brother Ben would never be so weak as to die of a fall—why, he had had a hundred falls, and had always got up again none the worse: as a baby he tumbled about with no more damage than an india rubber ball. 'A mere slip, Mrs Nowse, perhaps a little wrench,' she persistently assured her neighbour from next door, who had come in to render assistance. She was quite tearless, but her cheeks burned red. She was voluble in her confidences to the surgeon, who was a stranger: the Milners on both sides the family were of sound constitution, sweet-blooded, hale and hearty folks, who had made it a rule for generations to die only of old age—or accident! But this was no accident! What limb was broken? Had his head touched the stones? No, it had not. He was in pain, but a trifling internal injury that

made no sign but a degree of pain—what was it? Ben gazed at her with half-conscious, dim, lack-lustre eyes, and a smile on his lips that had never given her a hard word. His sister feared nothing, because she knew nothing. But Ben believed he was near the end of his tether, and was able to be rather surprised at the quietness with which he bore it. Faint hope makes restless: minds steadied with fortitude contemplate the inevitable calamity.

The doctor who had attended Ben home was a busy man in a far quarter of the town. He was glad to give the young man over into the hands of Mr. Lowther, who came without sending for the moment he heard that something amiss had happened to Ben Milner. Mr. Lowther was then on the rise of a great reputation, work crowded on him fast. There was no idle-time for him, but during the tedious progress of Ben Milner's cure he took care of him like a brother. And Ben made a perfect recovery. Mr. Lowther was very proud of his successful case, but Miss Phoebe said she was always sure her

brother would get well again, and was not disposed to grant the clever surgeon the amount of credit that he took. Ben was indebted to his excellent constitution in the first place, and in the second to his own good life, tainted by no sort of dissipation. Mr. Lowther had done his duty, and had, no doubt, helped to bring him round—under God. And she supposed there would be a terribly long bill.

But there was no bill at all from the doctor. Miss Phœbe flushed hotly, and was silent for a minute when Ben told her Lowther would take no money from him. She asked what return, then, could be made for his time and trouble. Ben said he did not know—they would be all friends again. And the boy was going to be christened; he was to stand god-father, and make him a present of his name: which he should do gladly; for his father was a good fellow. And Phibs must forgive him for marrying Mary—and forgive Mary for marrying him.'

A long bill would have been very inconvenient—almost crippling, to the Milners just

then, and Miss Phœbe experienced the sense of relief from anxiety. But she had not the generous character of her brother; and the remembrance of Mr. Lowther's unpaid services troubled her at intervals still with the feeling of irksome obligation.

CHAPTER III.

PATTIE.

THE day of Pattie Gardner's arrival in London was one of Ben Milner's busy days, but he promised to be home to dinner at eight o'clock. He dined generally at his club on these occasions, to avoid hurry; but he wanted to do honour to Pattie, and Miss Phœbe said it was no more than right and proper that he should. It was not necessary to meet the little girl at Kings's Cross; for she was coming up to London under suitable escort, and would be delivered at the Corner House by her travelling guardian. Miss Phœbe was therefore able to dress in a handsome gown and becoming cap, and to seat herself in her parlour, quite in state, and ready for Mistress Pattie.

'Mistress Pattie!' That was how the jealous

sister named her in her own heart—her original prejudice against her young rival surging still above her better feeling and resolutions. She had ordered Mary Ann to have tea and a rice-cake prepared to bring in at five o'clock, for the comfort and refreshment of the visitor after her journey; and then she would have time to unpack, rest a while, and dress for the evening after tea. The house was put into company trim throughout. Everything of the best was to be displayed, and Ben had spent a sovereign in ferns to adorn the pots in the sitting-room and the wire stands in the hall and on the landing. Miss Phœbe winked at the extravagance for once, considering the temptation, and promised herself that she would invest in an India-rubber plant or two—not so graceful, but far more durable than these airy, feathery ferns Ben was fond of.

A great many reflections passed over her mind as she waited for the striking of the momentous hour. Self-anxiety was the shape that most of them took. When Ben was there, and talking to her, she forgot her cares and

frets. She was wont to say that he was incapable of an unjust action, an unkind word, or a mean thought; and yet, when alone, she pictured her future as solitary and straightened, and altogether melancholy, from his desertion. And then she felt a resentment that made her pulses throb and face burn. She was in one of these fantastic fevers of the imagination, when the knocker resounded: the bell rang, and the noise, like a cold *douche*, restored her to her natural senses, and brought her back to the time present.

Immediately she laid down her knitting, and went out to meet her guest. She listened a minute, looking over the banisters and seeing no one, but hearing a pleasant voice: 'The basket is not to go upstairs. Put it, please, in some cool place—the larder will be best;' and then the speaker was out in the street again, bidding good-bye to her escort. Miss Phœbe descended just in time to catch a glimpse of him as he got into the cab again: a young man, tall and stout, with a great beard and florid face —not a face that, as it looked out of the window at the girl he was leaving behind him,

altogether pleased Miss Phœbe. Then Mistress Pattie came in, and Mary Ann shut the door, and Miss Phœbe advanced with a rather formal, dry manner, and offered her hand.

'I am sorry my brother is not here to receive you—it is he and you are friends—but this is a busy day at the Institution, and he is obliged to be there,' said she, in a voice that matched her manner.

'I remember you, Miss Phœbe,' Pattie said, kindly regarding her.

'Do you, my dear? I cannot say the same of you. You are grown quite out of knowledge.' And then they went upstairs to the parlour, and as soon as they were in the room the elder lady kissed the younger, and said that she was very glad to see her; and May was as favourable a time of year as any for a visit to London.

'A first visit,' said Pattie, with a radiant face. It was evident she was full of life, and had a fine revenue in good spirits. In her hand she held a bunch of roses that were not sweeter than her cheeks.

Mary Ann brought tea. Pattie was thirsty.

They talked. Miss Phœbe asked who Pattie's escort was.

'Mr. James Rufforth: he had not an instant to spare or I would have introduced him to you—I ought,' Pattie answered, and sipped her refreshing cup.

'One of the Burford Rufforths? The rich wool-staplers?'

'Yes, the same family. He is in the firm now. They made him a partner at Christmas. He has to see people on business, and then to get down to Dover, and cross to Calais to-night. He takes the foreign part of the concern.'

'He will have to make quick work of his business. It was convenient to have a friend to bring you to town.'

'Yes—for the name of the thing. He did not allow his task to be arduous. There were two old ladies and a clergyman in the carriage, and the first time the train stopped he left me with them, and transferred himself to the smoking compartment. However, he was useful to find my luggage, and see it put up on a cab. And then he must needs bring me to

your door. I told him it was unnecessary.' There was a momentary flush on Pattie's brow, and her voice had an inflection of pique or sarcasm. She loosened her bonnet, took it off, and dropt it on the floor beside her. Her ruffled hair, released, fell down about her neck in pliant, shining waves.

Miss Phœbe, seeing it, smiled. 'It is your own—and not by right of purchase. You are very like your younger self, now that your bonnet is off, Pattie—dimple and all. And quite as pretty as you promised to be.'

Pattie's velvet eyes gratefully acknowledged the compliment, and returned the observant gaze that was fixed upon her. 'Am I?' said she. 'Papa tells me I grow every day more like mamma—'

'Then you cannot grow like a lovelier or better woman. And now, my dear, shall I take you to your room? We will give the roses to Mary Ann, to put in water. They will be a treat to Ben—he loves flowers, Ben does.'

Miss Phœbe acquitted herself more agreeably than she had proposed. Pattie's charm of

countenance overcame her, and she yielded to the gracious influence. Pattie called Miss Phœbe to herself a dear old lady, and felt as young people feel who have a confidence that they are approved. She was used to be much made of at home, and expected the same elsewhere. In such expectations a pretty girl, as good as she is pretty, has seldom to complain of disappointment.

Pattie had time to spare when she was dressed, but she stayed in her room where the new buff chintz was all over dicky-birds and honey-suckles. The well-shaded window looked across a broad road to the Kensington Gardens, where people were walking about under the trees; on the road many carriages were running to and fro. Pattie established a chink between blind and curtain, and sat and watched the moving scene, thinking of nothing else, until Miss Phœbe knocked at the door, and announced: 'My brother has come home, Pattie, and is waiting for a peep at you.' And then Pattie shook off dull care, and with buoyant step passed into the parlour.

Ben Milner did not rise from his chair, but stretched out a hand to Pattie, who took it kindly. 'You may make me a present of a kiss, Pattie—you always did, you know,' said he, with the affectionate sovereignty of a friend accustomed to flattering indulgence.

Pattie complied with a blush, and a shy laughing look, and then her tongue spoke: 'That is for the last time, and for 'auld acquaintance sake, Sir: think much of it. I am to be treated with proper respect now. Please to observe that I am grown up, come out, and on my promotion.'

Ben stood upon his feet instantly, laid his hand on his heart, and bowed with consummate dignity and reverence. Pattie made him an elegant curtsey, and drew off; and Miss Phœbe said it was like sitting at a play. Mary Ann closed this first scene of the first act with a summons to dinner. It was performed in fun, but Ben recognised that they had assumed new relations. He was not made uneasy by it. The next minute Pattie accepted his arm to take her to dinner, and informed him that she

was *so* glad to be there. Miss Phœbe chose to follow them downstairs, and nothing escaped her. She saw the gay assurance with which Ben looked down on his companion, and the frank simplicity with which she looked up again at him. Pattie's dress was primrose-colour—a light striped fabric of silk and gauze, that was soft, and shone, and fell in broad folds to the ground. At her throat and wrists were very close quilled ruffles of tulle, and on one side of her hair was a bow of primrose-ribbon and black velvet. She was rather above the middle height, and of a rounded, supple, slender form. No picture could be prettier than her face, but as Ben had told Phibs, it was indescribable. The cool lustre of modest girlhood and the grace of tender expression were there, and spirit and sense. All who knew Pattie were very fond of her, and called her lovely. Ben Milner this evening dubbed her divine.

'I don't see that, nor do I suppose Pattie aspires to it yet,' said Miss Phœbe, dryly.

Ben talked during dinner in his usual bantering strain; for his sister was inclined to

be formal and literal, and Pattie was used to a merry circle of brothers at home. But in the parlour afterwards, with twilight stealing over, they were more sober, not to say serious. And Pattie sang a song to her own accompaniment on the piano. She had a tuneful pipe, and carolled brightly, straight out of her melodious heart. Miss Phœbe sat amazed, entranced: she was thinking; 'Why Pattie is quite clever too!' 'Ben nodded at his sister, and said in a loud whisper: 'Now, Phibs, is she divine or not?'

'She's human nature all through, Ben, and that's more to the purpose than an angel in the house.'

Ben acquiesced: 'My compliments to you, ma'am; that was spoken with sense and judgment.'

It was delightful to those two people to have their quiet life stirred by this music, and so sweet a music-maker; but Miss Phœbe cut the evening short on the plea that Pattie must be tired after her journey from Yorkshire—not that Pattie showed any signs of it. But she

went to her pillow, and slept the sleep of the young and healthy until half-past six, when Mary Ann called her. Miss Phœbe assembled her household for prayers at a quarter to eight, and at eight punctually followed breakfast. Ben returned from his customary morning stroll in the Gardens, just as the urn was brought in. His appearance was extremely cool and fresh.

'I am going to have a holiday, and take you out, Pattie,' said he, with much decorum.

'Are you? Where to?' Pattie asked, interested, and not self-conscious at all, though Ben's manner was new.

'To see pictures; eh, Phibs?' appealing to his sister.

'Yes. That will be very nice. Go to Bond Street first, show her Mr. Holman Hunt's picture. You have heard of the "Shadow of the Cross," Pattie?'

'Oh, yes. Mrs. Brooke, our rector's wife, told me that I must see it, because everybody sees it, but she thought it horrid. What fascinated her was Doré's picture of the "Dream of

Pilate's Wife." Which is the best painter, do you think?'

'I shall not tell you, Pattie. You must learn to have a taste of your own: opinions differ. You might walk to the Marble Arch, Ben, and take a hansom for the rest of the way.'

'Just so, ma'am. Your instructions are as judicious as they are minute. They shall be obeyed.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS.

London common places are revelations to country folks. Ben Milner knew that the Kensington Gardens in May were beautiful, but the years of almost daily traverse had so familiarised him with their beauties that he smiled at Pattie's enthusiasm. The red chestnuts and the double pink thorns caused her to cry out in admiration, and the long glades and vistas of wood amazed her.

'I did not come to London to see trees, but we have none so grand within miles of us, at home,' she said.

It was one of those days when distances are increased by a purple gloom, composed of heat and vapour, and portending rain. There was a shiver in the leaves overhead, and, at intervals,

an eddy in the dust underfoot. With the east wind there had been drought, and now, a change in the weather was working round.

Ben Milner and his companion walked apace, talking as they walked, and both in excellent spirits. Pattie was very pleasant to the eyes of both men and women, as many a glance shot at her by the one, and many a level gaze from the other, testified as she passed. She had not the accustomed air of the town-bred girl; she showed her country-breeding, and yet no one would have called her countrified. She was free and natural; well-braced and simple. Her firm, elastic step trod the ground evenly, keeping true time with Ben's. She carried her head up, and her movements were full of grace. Her manner was more animated than that of English girls in general; she used slight expressive gestures in conversation, and laughed with much frankness. Yet it had never been said that repose would improve her. Many times Ben looked aside at her with warm approbation. She had on a chip bonnet, white, with drooping daisies and

brown ribbons, and her costume was of two shades, of dead-leaf taffetas. They were so proud of Pattie at home that they took a delight in dressing her prettily, and she enjoyed it too. She had those weaknesses and vanities of her sex that count amongst the charms of youth and beauty. Ben observed that she was exceedingly neat as to her boots, and perfect in gloves: that she did not, in fact, neglect any of the details, personal or relative, which form a part of the complete gentlewoman's education. He was critical of women in Dean Swift's very homely fashion.

Pattie had never been in a hansom before, and did not like it. But Ben told her that it was a matter of course and of necessity in London, and they were soon at the place whither they were going. It was the middle of the morning. Ben paid for the tickets, lifted a curtain, and told Pattie to go in. Only a few persons were present—hushed, and the men with hats off as in church. Pattie glanced behind her for her companion, but he had stopped to speak to the clerk, sitting at the receipt of

custom. So she stept softly forward over the carpet, and stood a minute or two in front of the picture, taken quite by surprise. Then she went up to a third grade of the ascending platform, and seated herself, as others had done, for serious contemplation.

She was strangely affected. 'Despise not laborious work, which God hath ordained'—that was the first appeal it made; and then it was veiled by tears in her eyes. She was recalling the old, old story, and realizing it as never before. After a while Ben came and sat down by her, saying: 'Well, Pattie, how do you like it?' but was gently motioned to silence by a touch of her hand. She took from him the pamphlet describing the painting, and the artist's intention in it, but not to read it, to screen her face. Ben let her alone, greatly pleased in his own mind that she was sensible of such deep impression, alive to such emotion—dear, good girl!

Pattie did not get beyond feeling and remembering then. After a time, a rather considerable time, she rose, and intimated that she was

ready to go. She had not spoken yet: she had rallied her composure, which was all she could do. But, in the street again, she said she had seen as much as she cared to see that day; and she was not talkative on the road home. The rain held off until the drowsy hours of the afternoon, and then it came down with a will, drenching the garden, and making the laburnums hang their golden tresses heavily. Miss Phœbe's knitting pins twinkled fast, and Ben was lazy, after the morning's exertion. Pattie was full of cogitations. She took long looks at the leaden sky through the window, her hands fallen on her lap; and then again she lifted her hands and stitched for a minute or two at a piece of point-lace she was working to trim an apron. Ben began to speak of the wonderful picture, and, at last, she was persuaded to try and tell what she thought of it. He was very desirous to hear her, though he guessed at what he should hear. His idea was that it possessed her mind wholly.

Pattie's cheek evinced some confusion. Possibly her cogitations were of mingled yarn.

Certainly she was not used to giving expositions of sentiment. She spoke with effort, and her voice was ill-assured. 'It is not easy to put my feeling into words,' she said; 'I seemed to be there—all the ages and ages ago since it happened. It was like coming in upon them unawares, and surprising the young man rapt away from the day's weariness of labour into restful communion with God at evening. We do sometimes see that look on quiet faces at church.' Ben nodded, Miss Phœbe appeared to reflect. Finally, she nodded too. Pattie went on more quickly: 'Jesus must have been tempered so, by hard toil and habitual trust, for his mission. Can you follow him out of that workshop where his poor mother is turning over her treasures, and be one of the crowd listening to the Sermon on the Mount? I could, this morning. It is not the miracles I care to read, but the touching incidents that sound as true as yesterday, and the parables that carry as much weight of matter for to-day as for the time and place where they were spoken.'

'Yes, yes. Men are always the same,' said

Miss Phœbe with pious, philosophic air. 'The worst sinners are as ready as ever to cast the first stone; and priest and Levite still pass by on the other side.'

'Men are the same, but manners vary, Phibs,' said Ben. 'The modern priest would extenuate the robbery and cruelty of the thieves, as the fruit of original sin and bad education; and the Levite would sneer at the Samaritan for a meddlesome fellow, and ask why he could not mind his own business, and leave the half-murdered traveller alone.'

Pattie looked rather unhappy. 'I hope you are exaggerating,' said she, 'or else you are worse in London than we are in the country.'

'We are not worse, Pattie. And there are good priests and Levites as well as good Samaritans, and faithful shepherds as well as shepherds who have a private understanding with the wolf. But that type of worldliness that Jesus rebuked is not worn out.' Pattie retained her distressed, unconvinced air.

There was a knock at the door, and Mrs.

Nowse's voice was heard from the outside, asking: 'May I come in?'

'Yes. We are all here,' Miss Phœbe answered; and when her neighbour entered, she said, 'Pattie was telling us how she liked Mr. Holman Hunt's picture. Ben took her to see it this morning.'

'And is she very enthusiastic?' Mrs. Nowse said, bending her eyes on the young visitor with a measured interest. As Pattie did not reply to her query, she added: 'I predict that she will prefer Pilate's wife, as I do myself.'

'And I predict that she will not,' said Ben, decisively. 'But you must go again, Pattie. Your memory and imagination led you such a far cry that you were not able to observe the actual and present circumstances of the picture.'

'I saw the glow of sunlight, and the landscape through the little window where two pomegranates lie on the sill. And I noticed the scrolls, and I thought how Jesus was nourished in all wisdom—'

'And did you notice how well the shadow

is managed—the shadow and the cross?' Mrs. Nowse asked.

'I believe I was thinking of the life more than the death—but, of course, I saw the shadow.'

'Oh, you must go again. And look at the shavings, how well they are done, and the green water-pot. The coffer is most beautifully painted. As for the crown, I did not know that it was meant for a crown till somebody told me. And I think the colour of the flesh insufferable. It reminded me of rhubarb.'

'I have seen hay-makers in the fields as sun-baked. Nothing offended my eye as out of nature.'

'That is well spoken, Pattie. Nothing is out of nature,' said Ben.

'Taken as a whole, it is not a picture that I should wish to have hanging in my drawing room,' Mrs. Nowse announced, in a conclusive tone.

'It would not be in place there, Ben answered.

Miss Phœbe interposed with an inquiry

where her neighbour had been. Mrs. Nowse replied that she had been nowhere: it was raining too hard. 'I just came to tell you that I am going to the stores to-morrow first thing after breakfast, and to offer you a seat in the carriage, if it would be any convenience.' Miss Phœbe gladly accepted the offer, adding that perhaps Pattie might like to go too, she ought to see the stores. And she asked Pattie if they had co-operative stores in Yorkshire: she almost thought they originated there.

'We do not deal at any. Papa does not wish to see the class of shopkeepers extinguished; they are honest about us,' Pattie said. 'And we keep to the same shops year after year.'

'We go with the age in London: buy in the cheapest market, and sell in the dearest. It is all political economy with us.'

Pattie remembered that she must write a letter before post-time, and retired to her room. A minute or two later Ben sidled to his peaceful study.

Then Miss Phœbe looked up at her neigh-

bour, and whispered confidentially: 'Well, what do you think of her?'

'She is more than pretty—she is handsome, and I should think she can be lovely—her expression is so good. Rather high-flown in her notions, perhaps, but Ben likes a little sentiment; men at his age do, when they have been thrown with the Mary Lowthers and Phœbe Milners of creation.' Thus Mrs. Nowse.

Miss Phœbe knitted rather faster, sighed, and after a silence remarked that Ben seemed very happy, bless him! And she was trying sincerely to wish him success: 'For we can never tell until the word is spoken, how it may turn.' And then they talked of prosaic matters, chiefly stores.

CHAPTER V.

LOOKING FOR A LETTER.

It is not necessary to attend Pattie Gardner to the Civil Service Co-operative Stores, which she likened downstairs to an old-fashioned grocer's shop in a country town on market-day. Miss Phœbe took her list with her, and was promptly served; but Mrs. Nowse professed to carry everything in her head, and kept on dropping small articles, which necessitated much running backwards and forwards; and when they had started to go home again there was one return to make for lemons forgotten.

'I wonder you don't set down all you want before you come out,' Miss Phœbe said with the frankness of intimacy. 'It is quite a trial of patience to go shopping with you.'

Mrs. Nowse was endeavouring to catch some

evasive intention by the tail, and only said: 'Hum?' A practical woman in the main, she was provokingly desultory about purchasing. 'I daresay I shall recollect it as soon as I get back, but I cannot for the life of me think what it was—'

'Was it the sweeps?' suggested Miss Phœbe. But it was not the sweeps. Nor the carpet-beaters? No.

Pattie inquired at luncheon how many times a day the post called.

'Why, child, as often as he has anything to bring,' replied Miss Phœbe.

'Oh, yes, of course; but that is not what I mean. We have only one delivery at home, at eight in the morning. We have several here.'

'Half a dozen at least. But country letters arrive by the first and the last.'

Pattie did not, perhaps, look for a country letter. She had an air of expectancy whenever the door-bell rang that afternoon, but she asked no more questions. And she received no letter. The morning post brought her one from York-

shire: she watched Ben's hand to see if another was to be given to her, and perceiving the distribution to be over, she opened and read that she had got. She was not satisfied, but that was not observed.

Ben was absent all day, and his sister took Pattie to the Rose Show at the Horticultural Gardens. Miss Phœbe declared it quite a disappointment. There was neither a fine show of roses, nor a fine show of company. They sat under an awning, and listened to the military band. People passed and re-passed, but nobody to speak to.

'Ben promised to join us if he could, but it begins to be late,' Miss Phœbe said when six o'clock struck. 'It is no use lingering any longer. He will not come now.'

But, just as she spoke, Pattie caught a glimpse of him in the distance, advancing over the grass slowly, with a lady and a little girl. 'There he is,' said she, brightly;' 'and the nicest looking lady with him we have seen yet.'

'It is Mrs. Lowther. We will walk to meet them, or Ben may miss us after all,' Miss Phœbe

said, and rose with her little formal manner, shook out her pigeon-grey silk flounces, held up her head, and stepped to the encounter: she had never conquered the secret feeling that lost to him though she was, Ben still loved his Mary best of all the world—and therefore, better than her deserving self. Jealousy has more prickles than a hedgehog.

Pattie was wearing her primrose dress and a bonnet to match it. Miss Phœbe was proud of her appearance. She took a sidelong glance at her as they moved, and saw the girl was perfectly composed, serene, and pretty, as she could not help but be. Ben was pleased to shake hands with her himself; and then he named her to Mrs. Lowther, who smiled, and bowed with a kind intent look into her eyes. Pattie was conscious of it, and blushed—Mrs. Nowse had gazed in the same way—she supposed it was the London way of being polite, to stare. These ladies seemed to take her all in from head to foot, and then to set her price. She felt such interest disconcerting; if she had imagined the ground of it, she would have

wished to hide out of their sight. Pattie had her own ideas of many things, and was as modest a maid as ever grew. If she had any inclination towards Ben Milner, warmer than her old familiar fondness from a child, she was absolutely ignorant of it. There were reasons why she should have none at all; and she did not like to read inquiry, or suspect suspicion, in the significant looks of his friends. The colour on her cheek deepened to rosiest red at the mere thought.

'You have been sitting in the sun, Pattie,' Ben said. Pattie turned a deaf ear, and cooled gradually. Mrs. Lowther had become blank and inobservant. Ben whispered to Phibs: 'Has anything put Pattie out?'

'No; nonsense. What should have put her out?' said Phibs, in the same suppressed tone.

They walked to and fro; they looked over the ivied parapet on the cascades. There were great beds of rhododendrons, scarlet and crimson, bursting into bloom in the sunshine, white peonies hanging their heavy heads, and tulips, faded, like gorgeous ribbons unrolled on a

ground of green. Many neglects were apparent. The passion-flowers and clematises of last year stretched—withered webs and garlands—amidst the new springing leaves; and rare shrubs, starved and pined, in murky conservatories, revealed the decay of a brief prosperity.

'Improving speculations in pleasure do not seem to pay. These gardens were well kept once. They are running to seed fast now,' Ben said; and stood regarding the bare and half-filled rose stands, where rose-shows had erst been splendid. The echo of footsteps coming and going in the glazed corridors was dismally distinct. There was none of the cheerful hum that accompanies a crowd.

'A great many people have gone to see the coaching club meet at the Magazine,' Mrs. Lowther said, in explanation of the dearth of people there. 'They are to drive to the Alexandra Palace after.'

'I am afraid it is not that. The Society has reached out its hands too far. There are not subscribers enough to keep the place up. The spectacle is melancholy to-day.'

'The Gardens are not wanted in this neighbourhood. We had Kensington Gardens, and what can be more beautiful than the park since the flowers are so carefully tended? Has Miss Pattie been into the park yet at the gay time of the afternoon?' Pattie had not. The Milners kept no carriage, and rarely chartered one for pleasure. Mrs. Lowther paused a scarcely perceptible moment before she offered to give their young visitor that treat. 'It is a sight to be seen, Miss Pattie. We may meet some of the princesses—perhaps, the Prince and Princess of Wales themselves,' said she, 'or the Duchess of Edinburgh.'

Pattie sparkled up. 'Oh, I should be so glad! I wish we may!' This little country-girl was brimful of loyal curiosity. 'The Queen is not in London, or I would stand at her gates, and watch for her coming out.'

Mrs. Lowther mentioned some young lady who had been presented at the last drawing-room. Ben asked why—for pride, vanity, ambition? Mrs. Lowther replied: 'She is a great fortune. They give out that she will have a hundred

thousand pounds. And she is not amiss for beauty.'

'All sorts of people go to court now-a-days. I think they go very much out of their way,' said Miss Phœbe, coolly. Mrs. Dobb Parker got herself presented three years ago, and has presented a daughter each year since. Their money is run through, and their credit gone; and Sophy, Emily, and Loo are not married, nor likely to be. Their mother would have shown more sense if she had sought husbands for them amongst young professional men in their own rank of life, instead of pretending to connections with the aristocracy. So ridiculous to aspire beyond their station! They will have to retire to some cheap place on the Continent now, and they will deserve their fate.'

'Phibs, you speak like an oracle, ma'am. Divine Providence is obliged by your approval of their just visitation. Perhaps, after due repentance, they may be restored to grace, and married to Frenchmen,' said Ben. 'Let us pray for them, that they remain not in the forlorn estate of spinsterhood.'

Phibs did not condescend to a reply; she wished Ben would let his banter alone when Mrs. Lowther was there. That lady had a smile on her lips. She asked Miss Phœbe if she would lunch at her house next day with Miss Pattie, preparatory to the drive in the park. You are engaged at that hour,' she said to Ben.

'Yes. But if you would call for me at half-past four, I can make myself at liberty then. And I enjoy a little open-air amusement as much as my elders and betters.'

'That will do. We shall be a compact four.'

'I must beg of you to accept Pattie without me. I have another engagement. But I would not deprive her of the pleasure for the world,' interposed Miss Phœbe, hastily. She was letting naughty passions rise.

Pattie looked deprecatingly, but Ben said, 'Very well. Pattie shall come to you at one o'clock, Mrs. Lowther,' as if it were of no concern whether his sister went or not. He knew that it was an ordeal she would always

rather avoid, and his dear Mary and darling Pattie would get to know each other as well, without the restraint of her presence.

Mrs. Lowther and her little girl went away soon. Ben wished to loiter in the gardens until nearer dinner-time. Letters, notes, parcels delivered at the Corner House in the absence of the master and mistress were accustomed to be laid on the side-board near the dining-room door. Miss Phœbe looked in, as her habit was, and gathered everything into her hand, except one packet which was for her brother. Pattie said: 'There is nothing for me, then?'

'No, Pattie. I should have given it to you if there were, of course,' was Miss Phœbe's tart reply. She had not perfectly recovered her good humour yet.

Ben was opening his packet, which contained proof-sheets. He retired to his study with them. Pattie, unregarded, went upstairs rather slow-footed. In her room, she took off her bonnet, sat down on a chair at the foot of her bed, and was unhappy. Yes, Pattie could be unhappy in her way: an innocent, troubled,

uncomplaining sort of way, which admitted the general prevalence of tranquillity. She wanted a certain letter. It would not gladden her when it came, but the delay of it perplexed her. She would have had more peace in her secret heart had there been no such letter to expect. But it impended, and sooner or later was sure to arrive. Perhaps she had a curiosity to know what would be in it, her first letter of the kind. 'A love letter' we must call the thing; but Pattie had no tremulous anticipation of delight in it, nothing but an irksome feeling compounded of fear, shame-facedness, and wrath. She had suffered herself to be over-persuaded into a premature concession, which was held for a promise, and now she was repenting, and dreading the consequences. But, being strong, she did not fret or fling herself uselessly about; she looked at these consequences, and set her resolute mind to thrust them from her. Meanwhile she had nothing to do but wait for the letter.

CHAPTER VI.

AN AFTERNOON OF MAY.

Mrs. Lowther had all her three children about her when Pattie Gardner was deposited at her house by Miss Phœbe. They were in the drawing-room: a double-room with the front windows opening on a balcony and looking over a green square, and the back window opening into a conservatory full of ferns and flowers, with a large marble basin in the midst, and a sparkling fountain playing its light tinkle of music, and shedding a cool vapour into the warm summer air. The children were in white frocks. The two girls had blue sashes and the boy red. They made quite a picture. They were fair, with hazel eyes and soft rosy cheeks; with yellow hair cut straight across their fore-

heads and standing off in crisp crops behind their ears. They offered Pattie their hands and kisses most politely, and when she was sat down with her bonnet off by mamma, the smaller girl proposed to be taken on her lap, and was gratified.

Mrs. Lowther at home had a motherly, benign countenance, a good sweet face, and much likeness to her children. Pattie blushed often, without knowing why. Ben had said, last night, that he hoped she would take to this lady, whom he called 'a pattern.' Miss Phœbe had neither denied nor endorsed the title. Pattie was, of course, impelled to nice observation. On the floor was a capacious silk-lined basket of useful needle-work, and Mrs. Lowther continued to sew as she talked with her young guest; this Pattie found to be comfortable and friendly. It was a very new scene to her. The sound of the fountain and scent of the flowers pervaded the atmosphere. All had an air gay and elegant. White statuettes gleamed on brackets of ruby velvet; sunny landscapes in water colours brightened the pale primrose

walls, and rich Persian carpets relieved the olive amber of the silken draperies. There was not much furniture, for the rooms were apt to be full of people, but what there was looked well, and served its purpose admirably. So different from Pattie's home in the country, sober and old-fashioned as the hills it stood amongst, and crowded, nook and corner, with the gatherings and savings of generations. She was dazzled and charmed by all these novelties, and felt as if she had got into another world on this side of the Park. The Corner House was not so unlike home.

Mr. Lowther was in to luncheon. That was one of his two mornings a week when he saw patients at his own house. He had the appearance of a very busy man, too pre-occupied for much general conversation at this hour; but with always a loving or nonsense word for the children when they spoke to him. They did not speak often, and were as still as mice at a nod from their mother. Pattie thought it all so quiet, kind and pleasant.

After luncheon Mr. Lowther went away, and

the children were soon called for by governess and nurse. Then Pattie and Mrs. Lowther improved their acquaintance by a gossip about books, and here Pattie was nearly on a level with the London lady; and they liked the same authors. Presently came callers—the last a perfect enthusiast for the two American Revivalists who were then moving the town in concert. This was a young priest, lately from a country parish, and now attached to a vast London district, as assistant curate—a very tall, athletic, lean man, with a small head and neat features, and a positive voice. Mrs. Lowther heard him meekly, though it was not probable that he impressed her. Pattie listened in simple amazement to his account of how he assisted in the inquiry-room, to which persons anxious about their souls adjourned after the services for the purpose of privately consulting the new apostles. He detailed what such persons said to him, and he said to them again; which sounded very much like the confessional, without the safeguard of a consecrated silence. Mrs. Lowther had not been to hear the preachers, but she had heard

much of them. The world was full of their report both for good and for evil.

The young clergyman was still holding forth in his high dogmatic tone, when the eldest of the children ran in with unexpected news. 'Mamma, Uncle Ben is coming round the Square. We saw him out of the window, and it is my turn to go into the carriage!'

'Yes, Bell. When nurse takes the little ones into the garden you can come down to me. Miss Rich is gone?'

'Yes, mamma. It is four o'clock.'

Pattie had blushed up when the child announced Ben Milner's approach. She was awaking to the fact that his presence doubled every pleasure that she was enjoying; and without rhyme or reason, she was glad he had made himself at liberty earlier than he had promised, and had come to them instead of waiting to be sought. He entered, conducted by little Miss Bell, who held his hand, and wheeled him a chair that he might sit in the circle. Mr. Navone and he had met before, and the first question addressed to Ben was, Had he been to

the Haymarket yet?—for it was at the theatre in the Haymarket the revivalists were holding their meetings at that time. Ben had not, nor was he proposing to go. His manner was too dry for the curate's enthusiasm—he even confessed himself satisfied with such spiritual fare as was provided at his parish church of St. Stephen.

Mr. Navone waxed warm. He pressed his experiences, his convictions. 'My dear fellow, you are welcome to them,' said Ben. But he would give no opinion as to the usefulness or propriety of the revival services, and utterly refused to pledge himself for the pure sincerity of the revival preachers. He supposed they were liable to exaggeration, like other men borne on a wave of popular emotion. Passing by the Haymarket, he had seen a great concourse of people thronging the arcade in front of the theatre; some going in for tickets, some coming out, and policemen on duty keeping order. The majority were women—by their clothing not prosperous, perhaps not industrious, perhaps lost by slothful habits. The helpless, hopeless

vacuity of one face under a battered bonnet had fixed his observation. He was not prepared to say that such an one might not find in the hymns and sermons of the strangers that spur to a better life which she was in want of—nor was he prepared to deny that she might go to hear them only as a new diversion for her idleness. He thought that the fact of thousands and tens of thousands running to these preachers ought to keep them low with the humility of a great awe.

'There is nothing,' he said in his calm, philosophic manner, 'like a right sense of the responsibility assumed by teachers of religion for keeping noble minds in an attitude of reverence towards God and man. To deliver rules and precepts for the conduct of life is very easy. To set the example of a holy life that shall not mar the teaching is very hard. I have thought sometimes that the church is like the theatre, and the pulpit like the stage—the less we go behind the scenes, and know of the players, the better for the illusion.'

Pattie's countenance was expressive of a profound, astonished indignation. Mrs. Lowther

looked at Ben with deprecating sad eyes. To pluck the mask from the face of the pharisee is, in the sight of many women, only preliminary to lifting a profane hand to the Crown of Thorns. Neither spoke, but the elder lady bade Pattie come away, and put on her bonnet for their drive. The young clergyman was as dumb as they were. Mr. Navone had no fault so considerable as his youthfulness. He was willing to wear himself out in the obscure drudgery of the district where he served, and did not stand self-convicted of insincerity. But he reddened. His temper was arrogant and liable to sudden heats, but he knew that, and kept a guard on it. He got up and walked about the room, pausing before the pictures, but not seeing any. Then he gave his hand to Ben—it was time he was going on his road, he said. He was white now, and spoke in a carefully controlled gentle voice. Ben felt rebuked, and the more uneasy of the two when the curate went away.

Also he had then to endure being reminded by Mrs. Lowther of that old rule of good manners which forbids to cast idle accusation

upon the clergy because they are debarred from certain methods of rejoinder; to hear Pattie whisper that he was very unkind to say such things: 'It is easy to be witty, if you don't scruple to be ill-natured,' was her rather strong remark. 'For one bad clergyman there are a hundred good. I wish you would not rail at them. I don't like it.'

'That is an excellent reason, Pattie. I will bear it in mind. But *rail*—did I rail? Speak by the card. You have taken my illustration with too much solemnity.'

'No, Ben—it was a very cruel word you uttered. You know what Mr. Navone thinks of theatres and actors,' said Mrs. Lowther, gravely. 'Anybody would have felt hurt for him. He may not be very wise—he is very young. But do you know the life he leads? How he spends the live-long day teaching in schools, going from house to hospital, and from cellar to garret, amongst the poor and sick? When will you do so much? And he exists on a quarter of the pittance he earns that he may keep a few shillings in his pocket to give away. My

husband who goes often behind the scenes, and knows much of the players, has a respect for that poor curate. I can understand how the hymns of the revivalists may lift his own heart for an hour above the dead level of earthly care that he works in every day. We cannot dwell on the heights always, but we may look up to them with longing now and then. Your sober, judicial mind is the most comfortable, perhaps; but emotion and enthusiasm have their noble part in the world too.'

Ben Milner could but bow his head, and hold his peace under this discipline, this regimen. To what purpose is argument with women when their pious principles are infringed?

A servant brought in cups of tea, diffusing a fragrant steam. 'Has Mr. Navone gone without his tea?' little Miss Bell asked, arriving in full dress. 'Oh, dear! and he will not have any—he does not go home until after night school. What a pity! Mamma, I am so sorry, I was not here to take care of him.'

'He is gone, Bell. He went while we were all up stairs.'

Ben Milner was hit on every side. It is to be hoped that he felt truly ashamed of himself. His sensations were not, however, irksome enough to render him insensible to his agreeable situation opposite the charming faces of his old love and his new, that soon beamed on him plenary absolution for his sins. It was five o'clock, and a most beautiful afternoon. And the Park was brilliant. They took first the long round over the bridge across the Serpentine, that Pattie might admire the landscape. She called it glorious. There was the river flowing silver-bright between green slopes set with glowing clumps of rhododendrons, and shadowed by rows of magnificent beeches and chestnuts, clad in the aerial freshness of May before the burning summer has darkened the foliage to a uniform gloom. On the one side, the glades of Kensington stretched away until the blue distance closed them in mist; on the other, softly clear against the horizon rose the towers of Westminster, above an impenetrable screen of elms. Behind that screen was the dusty turmoil of the great city.

'Who would imagine we are so near it?' said Pattie.

Then they entered into the ranks of the carriages, and kept the pace measuredly. What a wonder and delight it all was to the fresh country novice! The horses, the equipages, how numerous, how sumptuous; the ladies how indolently gay, reclining on their cushions. Many had children with them. There were some solitary figures, and some weary or discontented faces; and some grotesques, and a few invalids. But in the carriages not many men. The men were driving coaches with four-in-hand, or mail phaetons with a spirited and handsome woman seated by them; and here and there women were driving with stout capability themselves. Girls flashed by at a gallop in the ride, their flaxen hair floating behind them; and bucks of a generation almost passed away, were keeping it in remembrance at a discreet amble. And then the swells of the reigning generation, crowding the rails where the ring was most crowded: and the belles, parterres and gar-

lands of belles, upon the side-walks, in the latest modes of the spring season.

Ben was amused by Pattie's fervent applause. 'This is the most fashionable avenue of Vanity Fair,' said he. 'The wicked world has nothing finer to show you in the way of men and women taking their pleasure.'

'Why should they not take their pleasure, if they have done their work?' Pattie rejoined. 'It does not look a very wicked world,—it looks a clean and prosperous world. What beautiful people there are, what handsome young faces!'

There was none handsomer than Pattie's own. Ben was no cynic. It was a satisfaction to behold her.

'Now somebody grand is coming?' announced Bell alertly, as a mounted policeman rode by straight and fast.

That was the Russian princess, the Duchess of Edinburgh. Twice again she came round; and then with the same easy clearing of the course appeared the carriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales, accompanied by Prince and Princess Louis of Hesse.

'You are in luck, Pattie,' said Ben, congratulating her.

Pattie felt herself very highly favoured indeed. Her countenance was quite splendid with delight, radiant as a child's. Then suddenly there were tears in her eyes: 'I am sure I don't know why,' she said, trying to wink them away.

Mrs. Lowther laughed and excused them: 'I once saw the Queen go in state to open parliament, and when the people cheered her I could have cried: There are more impulses in women's hearts than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Mr. Milner.' Ben had the audacity to say that he knew all about them.

Ben Milner was happy. It was a long while since he had experienced such a buoyancy of humour, such a light exhilaration of spirits. And Pattie Gardner was all the cause. She had the prettiest simplicity of affection for him in her looks and tones and ways. She had known him so many years that she was not afraid of him; and only shy with that attractive

shyness which comes like the bloom on the ripening peach with the colour and softness and glow of the sun.

The carriage was turning very slowly to go out of the park at the Victoria Gate when this bloom on Pattie's sweet face deepened suddenly to a scarlet flush. She leant forward to look behind with alarm as well as surprise in her expression. Ben watched her, and asked, when she had regained her composure, if she had seen some acquaintance in the crowd.

'I fancied so. But I must have been mistaken,' Pattie said. There was a sort of startled breathlessness in her voice. Little Miss Bell stared at her, until, meeting the child's hard gaze, she repeated in a lighter tone: 'Of course, I was mistaken. But I never saw such a likeness in a stranger.'

No one requested further explanation. The carriage rolled on. Pattie was silent, and full of perplexed, conflicting thoughts. She was *quite sure*, and yet she felt positive that she must be mistaken. Bewildered by these two irreconcil-

able propositions she was set down with her kind host at the Corner House; and Mrs. Lowther, beaming her good wishes on them, went her way home with her little daughter.

CHAPTER VII.

PATTIE ASSISTS AT A BALL.

THE letter Pattie Gardner expected did not come the next day, nor the next after that. The week was at an end. She had arrived in London on the Tuesday. It had been a delightful week to Ben Milner, a week without flaw. His dear jealous Phibs had grown fond of Pattie, and behaved beautifully to her. Pattie rather petted and patronized the elder lady. Some girls have that way, and Miss Phœbe seemed to like it. Ben looked on, and lived in clover. His anxious moments, if any, were very few. Phibs once or twice teazingly bade him not be so confident; but she had no doubts herself. Why should she have? Pattie appeared most sweetly propitious; and Ben, good, clever, handsome as he was, deserved

that she should be so. Such were his sister's views and sentiments, as developed and confessed to her discreet friend and neighbour, Mrs. Nowse.

In Ben's absence they spent their time very cordially together. Pattie had the sympathetic air of a good listener, and Miss Phœbe soon discovered that she never tired of hearing about Ben. She put the plainest interpretation upon this circumstance, and Ben was talked of everlastingly. Sometimes Pattie would go off into a low peal of mirthful laughter; for Miss Phœbe's revelations about her boy were often comic in their absolute simplicity. Pattie loved him innocently, and nothing could make her less respectful to him; but if he could have known the trivial tales of peril and adventure that beset his infancy and growth which were confided to her tender ears he might have worn, perhaps, a more bashful and less assured countenance than he habitually did.

One evening it happened that Pattie's lively imagination all at once brought back some funny story that she had been entertained with,

and she laughed out in the midst of a stillness, and when questioned why, she refused to give an account. Ben ordered her to tell him. Pattie would not. Miss Phœbe peered over her spectacles, guessed at the truth, was discreetly quiet, and went on knitting, with just a suspicion of a blush on her cheek-bones. The more Ben commanded and entreated, the more obdurate Pattie grew.

At last said Phibs: 'Let her alone, Ben; she will tell you some day, perhaps, if you are good. But if she says she won't now, she won't, and you might as well leave off plaguing her. Pattie can say "No," you see, and stick to it.'

Ben desisted for that time, but he recurred to the subject at irrelevant moments. 'What was it, Pattie? Tell me, what was it? Just whisper.' Pattie put him off with faithless, feigned confidences. And all the while he knew. He had made Phibs speak, and she had said further they were both as foolish as a pair of children.

Who can be always wise? Not any one, and least of any, lovers. Ben Milner was

Pattie Gardner's lover. And what was Pattie to Ben? That is not so easy to state. Ancient intimacy stood for everything with her. That explained why Ben was so diligent in his attendance upon her: why he forsook his club and came home to dinner daily, and brought no friend with him, that he might be wholly at her service. That was why he was ready to fetch and carry at her bidding; to take a late walk with her under the purple clouds and dripping trees of Kensington Gardens at the end of a long, rainy day indoors; to convey her to the school of art needlework, and wait patiently while she unravelled the mystery of beautiful stitches; to guide her critically through interminable galleries of pictures, and one memorable afternoon to bring her an impromptu invitation to a ball.

'Phibs, you must put on your silver gown to-night, and play chaperone to Pattie. She is going to a ball, ma'am,' said he, breaking in unexpectedly on their five o'clock tea. 'And you must be fairy godmother, and make her smart.'

Pattie set down her cup, and clapped her hands. 'Oh, how more than joyful!' cried she, her eyes dancing, and smiles and dimples spreading like sunshine over her face. Miss Phœbe contrarily assumed a gravity most unbecoming the occasion, and begged in an exasperating, tart voice to be informed where this ball was to take place.

'At the Fulwoods, Lancaster Gate,' said Ben, abating a little of his vivacity.

'I thought as much,' was his sister's dry rejoinder. 'And you suppose that I shall go? Then you are very much mistaken! In the first place, balls are not in my way, and never were. In the second, I have no acquaintance with Mrs. Fulwood, and do not wish to have; she is far too grand for me. And in the third, I do not enjoy being kept out of my bed until four o'clock in the morning. If Pattie is to go you may chaperone her yourself, but I do not believe she has any dress fit to appear at a ball of two hundred people. Have you, Pattie?'

Pattie's countenance had fallen into eclipse.

'I don't know,' said she with wistful diffidence.

'Then let her go without a dress,' cried Ben with true masculine impatience and unreason.

'And nice she would look among girls out of the fashion-book,' retorted Phibs.

'You are to go, Pattie,' said Ben with emphasis. 'That primrose gown—what ails the primrose gown? It is very pretty. It will do at a pinch.'

Miss Phœbe's nose and accent expressed a depth of scorn and disapproval impossible to convey in words: 'People do not go to balls at Lancaster Gate dressed at a pinch. At a pinch, indeed! I just see Mrs. Fulwood's face at the announcement of a girl in a high dress and thick shoes.'

'There is until half-past nine. Could you not trick her out fine enough in the Grove?' urged Ben, desperate.

'The Grove! I thought you had forbidden the Grove even to me. It is very far from Pattie's style—'

'Never mind, let me stay at home,' said

Pattie, with a virtuously suppressed disappointment trembling in her voice.

This pathetic resignation touched Ben keenly. Her velvet eyes implored still, while her tongue acquiesced in adverse fortune. As for Miss Phœbe she felt that she had a right to be angry.

'It is very provoking of you, Ben—like getting your own hair cut before a party—to expect a girl from the country to be ready at an hour's notice for a ball in London, when her mother knows we are not ball-going people, and were not likely to send her up prepared.'

'Speak for yourself, Phibs; I am in accord with Pattie, and always like a dance,' said Ben.

'Then go. Pattie would be mortified if she did not appear like the rest.'

'I have my white dress that I wore at my brother Jem's wedding in March; mamma thought that might do in case of an evening-party,' Pattie timidly suggested, and paused, gazing from one to the other.

'Why did you not mention it before, and

save so much unnecessary talk?' snapped Miss Phœbe. 'What is it?'

'White poplin, and a polonaise of white crape embroidered with wreaths of spring flowers. It is not a real ball-dress, but it came from Paris, and is soft and pretty—I don't know about the bodice.'

'But I do. It is lovely, Pattie; how came I to forget it? You will go, Phibs?' Ben said, entreatingly.

'No, Ben, indeed I will not,' answered Miss Phibs with no sign of relenting.

Ben sat a minute in perplexity. But Pattie's fears were over. 'Ben, dear, can you get me a flower for my hair, a bit of geranium and spray of fern?' said she, coming up to him close, and speaking as if it were a secret.

'I'll try, Pattie;' looking at her with great kindness. He continued to look, fascinated, until Pattie turned aside with her shy blush of dawning consciousness, and her heart beating faster by several degrees.

Ben felt that his sister was sadly misbehaving. A chaperone for Pattie was indispensable. 'Is

Mrs. Nowse going to the Fulwoods, Phibs?' he inquired at a venture.

'I should think not,' said his sister, reservedly.

'Then I must walk across the park, and ask Mary.' In moments of thoughtlessness Ben still called Mrs. Lowther 'Mary;' a proof to Miss Phœbe that she was always 'Mary,' in his memory and his dreams.

He went off in a hurry, and Pattie went off too, on her pleasure intent. Miss Phœbe was left reflecting. She pursued her brother's figure with her eyes as far as she could see. Then she took a turn round the room, got out of her crossness, and bethought her of the conventional forms and proprieties of London life and society; and of how she might be blamed for remissness and eccentricity if she allowed her young visitor to go to a large dance with only Ben. Pattie's mother might find fault, and it was not certain that they would be married.

In conclusion Miss Phœbe went to her chamber, and drew out that tray of her wardrobe where her silver gown reposed, to be in

readiness for the last emergency if Mrs. Lowther were unable to take Pattie under her wing. Then her best cap and blonde *fichu* were laid out, her gloves, her fan, her company shoes, all exhaling a delicate odour of lavender. Disinclination retired into the back ground as the preparations for duty advanced, and it was with a sense of chagrin that, at the moment they were completed, she heard Ben mounting the stairs two steps at once, and crying out: 'Phibs, Pattie, where are you? Mrs. Lowther will call at a quarter to ten—and Mary Anne is waiting to bring in dinner—'

With as much haste as consisted with laying her gala clothes straight Miss Phœbe restored them to their places, and went to table in a tolerable humour, considering the circumstances. She did not make known her useless repentance, and Ben never suspected it. As a rule, Phibs knew her mind, and did not lightly change it.

Pattie was bidden to show herself in the parlour when she was dressed, and Mrs. Nowse

arrived from next-door by invitation of Miss Phœbe, to pass an opinion on the little country-girl's appearance. Ben was standing with his back to the hearth, when Mary Anne opened the door wide, and announced expansively that she was coming.

They heard the light trip of her feet, and then in she came, white and blushing, the sweetest and prettiest picture!

It was a merit in Pattie that she wore her clothes with a grace, and did not carry them like an encumbrance. Mrs. Nowse was surprised into an exclamation of praise, and Miss Phœbe admired with a sort of fluttered pride.

'Why, Pattie, that is an exquisite dress! You would need no better if you were going to the Queen's Ball,' cried she, and made her stand where she could walk round her.

'It is easy to tell where it was made,' observed Mrs. Nowse. 'Such simplicity and such perfect taste!'

Ben said nothing. Perhaps he thought the more. Pattie became her silk attire. It fell in soft, broad shining folds that draped without

disguising her beautiful form, and the bodice, of which she had hinted a doubt, cut square and rather high, was lovely, as Ben had said in the afternoon.

There was nearly a quarter of an hour to wait for the appointed time, and Pattie was invited to employ a few minutes of it in putting the flower Ben had provided for himself into his button-hole. He was difficult to please, and took it out that she might put it in again. This very transparent manœuvre made Pattie smile, but when he took it out the second time she said: 'Perhaps Miss Phœbe will do it right.'

'But there would be no fun in that—try again, Pattie; and if he is not satisfied then, let him do it himself,' said his sister.

And, at last, Pattie was successful.

Mrs. Lowther reached the Corner House punctually, and received Pattie with a warm welcome. Mr. Lowther was there—cordial too, though the young lady's company involved probably, a later hour for getting away from the ball. He gaped on the road to it, and avowed himself sleepy; but his wife promised

him that he would wake up as soon as he saw the lights and heard the music. Pattie was glad and quiet, and observant of everything. Quite a crowd was arriving at the house when they arrived, and the hall and stairs seemed thronged with guests and servants. Dancing had commenced, and the new-comers were ushered first into the boudoir, where the hostess awaited her guests, standing coolly near the open door of a recess filled with ferns and flowers, in the midst of which played a miniature fountain. The lights, the scents, the brilliant colours, made a fairy-scene to Pattie's eyes, but she was not left long in contemplation of it. A stout gentleman with a white rose in his coat came up to Ben Milner, and the next minute a partner for a quadrille was proposed to Pattie in the person of a tall, slim son of the house, who recalled to her *l'oiseau au long bec* of the fable. He was an excellent partner, however. And what a charming ball-room: an immense room, with a strained linen drugget over the carpet to dance on, and crimson settees against the walls—no furniture besides to impede the

career of the dancers. There was space to move at ease, and to show off the ladies' dresses. The band occupied a narrow orchestra at the lower end, near the door, and played the most enchanting music. Pattie had heard nothing like it. The tinkle of a piano had been hitherto the best accompaniment to her mazy footsteps in the dances at home.

One thing perplexed Pattie. Ben did not invite her to dance with him. He ornamented the door-way, or a mantel-piece, and talked and was known to everybody. He was a man who was much liked by his friends, and his reputation stood high with new friends and old. If he had not resisted the temptations of society, his sister Phoebe would have seen little of him.

But Pattie did not want for partners. She was, indeed, in great request after her first essay. Mrs. Fulwood, a very busy fashionable woman, was inquired of who she was: 'A north-country cousin of Mr. Milner's; never in London before. Mrs. Lowther brought her,' was her

explanation. Then Mrs. Lowther was appealed to for introductions. Pattie danced with such life and spirit that it was a pleasure only to watch her, and of this pleasure Ben took his fill. There were at one moment three young gentlemen bowing their requests before her. Ben was standing not far off, gratified by her triumph and amused by her hesitation. She was consulting a card of the dances that had been given to her, and on which she had omitted to set down her engagements; and each of the three was pretending that the turn was his. Pattie shook her head gently, intimating a negative to all; and with soft swift motion crossed over to Ben, and whispered: 'Ben, dear, would not you like to dance with me?' There was a plaintive suggestion of remonstrance against his self-denial in her voice; for Pattie knew he would like, though he did not ask. Ben said: 'Yes, Pattie dear'—and went off with her as gaily as she could desire.

Her whispered plea had been overheard: 'That is a nice, fresh girl—simple concerning evil,' said one man to another.

'If there be such a girl left,' was the rejoinder.

Ben Milner had no doubt that many such girls were left. He found Pattie bewitching in her little sweetnesses and audacities—sweetnesses and audacities so flattering to himself. And Mary had given her word for it that she was as good as gold—gold in the ore, yet, but metal that would come out real in the minting. His first dance with her was a quadrille. Then they had a galop. And after that he gave her up to the crane-billed eldest son of the house, who seemed deeply smitten. Mrs. Lowther told Ben he was going backwards—turning young again. Ben had no spice of the prevalent, cynical philosophy, but he did not wish to provoke any premature surmises about Pattie and himself beyond the narrow circle of his perfect sympathies. Mrs. Lowther might hint a congratulation, but when an obnoxious gossip attempted to rally him on his unwonted exertion in behalf of his pretty provincial partner, he confronted her with blank non-comprehension, and routed her suspicions completely.

Pattie was too blithely busy with her feet to tax her brains in a ball-room. She was very happy, and at the pinnacle of enjoyment. A dance was a dance to her yet without ulterior design. She loved to slide and twirl to measured music, for the mere pleasure of the motion. And her head was able to keep her feet admirably. There were no collisions with Pattie; there was no wildness in her air, no flush of overpowering excitement on her face. Her velvet eyes were deep and soft always, and the china rose of her cheek was cool and changeable the night through. Strong and vigorous was Pattie, like a beautiful plant grown in open ground, in healthy breezes and temperate sunshine. There were other girls as fair and graceful, but hardly one so all-perfect in the lustre and bloom of youth.

And there were girls cast in a quite different mould, who blushed without modesty, and laughed without glee; whose hard eyes stared superciliously, beating down white eyelids like Pattie's more abashed than by a full blaze of masculine admiration. At the buffet in the refresh-

ment room these drank more dainty drinks than was at all good for them, and talked in phrases unknown in Pattie's vocabulary. And there were men to match them, young men to whom the country girl's flower-like beauty would have seemed insipid.

After supper these were noisier. There were hot faces and faster waltzes. Pattie looked at Ben appealingly, when she was entreated to join in one. 'You have had enough? Then sit still,' said he, and sat down by her. They moved off presently to the boudoir, where chaperones were dozing in a subdued light, and two lovers were making up a quarrel amongst the ferns. Mr. Lowther was listening to a hurried emphatic statement by a stout man at the head of the stairs, and Mrs. Lowther was exchanging news with a friend whom she had not seen for ages—as ages are counted in town.

'Ready to go? Then we will have the carriage,' said she.

Pattie carried her enthusiasm home with her, and the next day wrote a letter to her mother full of it.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SURPRISE.

WHEN Ben Milner came to breakfast the following morning he held out his strong, white wrist to his sister, and said: 'It does not happen often, Phibs, but here is a button off. I wonder whether Pattie would sew it on?'

'Not if she is wise,' said Miss Phœbe. 'If you do, Pattie, he will have a button off every morning. My work-basket is on the side-table.'

Pattie laughed, sought a needle and thread, and remarked that Ben must certainly be the last man in the United Kingdom who wore shirt-buttons. Ben shrugged his shoulders, and informed her that Phibs would not let him have studs—she called them fads and vanities; he

had long coveted a set of gold studs and sleeve-links, but to no purpose.

'Keep still, or I may prick you,' said Pattie, in the soft voice of heedful occupation.

'Studs and links require two button holes, and I hate button-holing—that is the reason. If you can pursuade Pattie to make you double button holes you may have them and welcome,' said Miss Phœbe.

Pattie's morning face was a redder rose than usual when she sat down to breakfast, and her velvet eyes were peculiarly shy. Ben was rather silent, but pleased enough. Miss Phœbe minded her tea-pot, and dilated on the useful, ingenious idea of the cosy to keep tea-pots hot. Then she proposed that Pattie should embroider a cosy to carry home for a present to her mother; black and scarlet, worked in gold thread, she should advise.

The brother and sister were very simple people, and felt both as if they were arrived on a sunshiny platform of life. They had no present trouble nor anxiety, nor was any coming shadow of them perceptible. If Pattie did not

tenderly incline towards Ben, what meant her blushes, her modest averted looks?—but she did—Phibs was sure of it. And Ben was sure of it too. Pattie's aspect was all that he could desire—she would not be won without wooing, but she was becoming aware that she was wooed. Every day Phibs approved her more. Pattie had little uneasinesses about post-time, but they did not last; she was very happy, and did not reflect that she might be on a wrong tack while all was so pleasant. Ben went to his duty with as light a heart and step as ever hopeful lover did, and returned to his house with a cheerful assurance of welcoming, pretty looks and words.

And on a certain afternoon this was what occurred. Miss Phœbe and Pattie were working and chatting in the parlour.

'We shall feel lost without you, when you have to leave us, Pattie,' said Miss Phœbe, with a kind glance at her.

'I am glad of it—I like to be missed,' Pattie answered. 'But you will come down into Yorkshire the next time Ben comes, Miss Phœbe?'

'We will think about it. I'll come and see you married, Pattie—I promise that. But I am not much in favour of leaving home on common occasions. My health has never required me to go out of London every year as it does some ladies, which is convenient; for travelling is a great expense.'

Pattie's face had all in an instant flushed carnation. Her needle paused in her lace-working; and she said in a distressed, expostulating voice: 'Then mamma has written to tell you I am engaged? She promised not.'

Miss Phœbe had made her hazardous little speech at a venture, thinking of Ben, and not lifting her eyes. She dropt a stitch in the start she gave, as she now looked up: 'To Mr. James Rufforth?' she said, interrogatively.

Pattie nodded 'Yes.' Her colour had vanished as suddenly as it rose, and her eyes were dark with tears.

Miss Phœbe's attention reverted to her knitting: 'You have, indeed, taken time by the forelock, Pattie,' said she in a low tone, and was silent for a long while after. Pattie was

just as little inclined for idle talk. She applied herself to her needle again, but the tender serenity of her face was clouded, and she sighed from time to time, as if her heart were overburdened with pain. Miss Phœbe was the first to speak, and resume the subject, which seemed mysterious.

'Your engagement will be news to my brother Ben,' she began, with an unconscious return to her dry and formal manner which had operated as a check on Pattie's buoyancy at her coming to London.

'I suspect he will not like it,' was Pattie's odd reply.

'That will not matter much, if you like it,' said Miss Phœbe. 'I suppose he will have to like it; you don't need his consent.

'No,' said Pattie, drearily. She wished she did; for she felt sure he would never give it.

Miss Phœbe was curious to learn more, but her manner was discouraging. Pattie's confidences would have been full and free, had she shown that she desired them; but she had a delicacy, remembering Ben's hopes, and that

Pattie was their guest. She left sentiment on one side, and entered into the material and practical part of the subject.

'The young man is well off, no doubt?' she said, with a cheerful affectation of worldly interest.

'Yes. His father allowed him five hundred a year up to Christmas, and he lived at home—he does still. But since he has been taken into the firm he has a half share in the business. He is building a house about three miles out of the town, in a beautiful spot amongst the hills.'

'Have you been to see it, Pattie? Is it there you are to live?'

'I have been to see it—yes.'

'From the glimpse I had of him, he is a tall, good-looking young man.'

'Most people tell me so.'

'Is it not your own opinion? You are very cool, Pattie.'

'So is James cool. All the girls in the Riding may draw lots for him for me!'

Miss Phœbe at this amazing speech looked

up in wonderment. Pattie's forlorn and dolorous countenance had given sudden place to rosy scorn. She was recollecting how she had been left a prey to old ladies' society in the train, while James was enjoying himself in a smoking-carriage. This neglect had piqued her at the time; and his forgetfulness in sending her no letter since he went abroad had magnified it into a prodigious, unpardonable affront. At this moment she regarded it as equivalent to a release from any bond that she had been under.

'I told papa that I did not care for him, and that I did not believe I ever should,' Pattie went on, drawn into details by Miss Phœbe's evident, though unexpressed sympathy. 'James wants to marry, and must needs have a wife. But it was not necessary that he should choose me.'

'His preference is excusable, Pattie. Don't you feel flattered by it?'

'Not a bit! I call it very unfair. I am young, and have never been in love with anybody. James is a hundred (that is to say, he is

over thirty), and has been a flirt all his life. Papa puts that off, and says he will make a good husband; but mamma wishes I might have been allowed a little time to look about me, before being handed over to matrimony.' Pattie, being frankly moved by the exposition of her own hard case, used expressions current in her local society, speaking her mind in plainer terms and with more vivacity than Miss Phœbe in decorum could approve.

'But if it is a solemn engagement, dear,' she began to remonstrate.

'There is nothing solemn about it,' interrupted Pattie. 'James spoke to papa. Papa said he had no objection; and then James *wrote* to me—just as if it were business! I wrote him my answer, and carried it to papa to read. Papa said it was a very proper letter; but he wished I would take time to consider, before giving a deserving man such a decided refusal. And I fell into the trap, Miss Phœbe. I took time to consider; and James took advantage of that to pretend that I had consented. He came over and made me a lot of speeches (no one else can

get a word in edgeways when James talks), and all the comfort and relief I have had since has been from mamma, who promises me that I shall not be hurried.'

Miss Phœbe was almost shocked. 'There is not much romance in your story, Pattie. But was there no courtship to lead up to the proposal? Did you not yield rather more than you like to admit? Come now—fair play is a jewel, even where an obnoxious suitor is in question.'

Pattie blushed, but answered with resolution: 'No, Miss Phœbe, there was no courtship but what I have told you. James was at home with us, and he always brought me fairings, but I thought nothing of that; everybody did. Before he asked me, I used to fancy it would be grand to be married; but I see it in a different light now. I don't care for James. I would as lief go to prison as marry him.'

This was explicit enough. 'Still, my dear, an engagement is a serious affair,' Miss Phœbe said. She felt it right and proper to say this; her bounden duty under the circumstances, but

it was cruelly disconcerting and disquieting to Pattie. She continued: 'A girl ought not to play fast and loose with a man, and your father will not allow it. If Mr. James Rufforth is set on having his bargain, I do not expect you will be able to get off it, unless you can plead that you love somebody else.'

These concluding words would have been better left unsaid. Pattie's face was dyed scarlet for a minute, and then she replied: 'I shall not plead anything but what is true—that I do not love *him*. Don't tell Ben, Miss Phœbe; I am ashamed of it altogether. And I would rather not have the end of my visit spoilt.'

'Very well, Pattie. I will not say a word to Ben, as you bid me not. Here he comes, poor boy! If you want to keep your secret, you had better run away till dinner-time, for your face tells a tale.'

Pattie escaped, and Miss Phœbe, still feeling the vibration of the surprise she had had, essayed to receive her brother as if nothing particular had happened.

Ben had come in as complacent as he went out, and did not perceive that his sister was acting a strange part. She sometimes had hushed moods, into the mystery of which he was not in the habit of inquiring.

'Where is Pattie?' he said, presently.

'In her own room, dressing, I imagine,' replied Miss Phœbe, and glanced at the clock.

'Ah, that reminds me. Are you in the humour to go out to-night, Phibs? There are our tickets for the conversazione at South Kensington. Pattie would like it; and I want to show her Mulready's picture of "Choosing the Wedding-gown."'

'We will ask her when she comes down—' Phibs stopped short with a distressful aspect. 'Choosing the Wedding-gown,' indeed! Was that a subject for them to contemplate in company? Ben might commit himself. She had done wrong in acceding to Pattie's wish to deceive him about her engagement. He ought to be set upon his guard. Something in her manner struck him as unusual.

'What is the matter, Phibs?' said he, scrutinizingly.

Phibs was very bad at dissimulation. 'Don't ask me any questions, Ben; for I am not free to speak. But I would have you mind what you are about. I think it likely that you are assuming too much in your own favour with regard to Pattie. You may remember that I warned you before. She means no harm, but she may be doing it, notwithstanding.' Equally Phibs meant no treason; but this was tantamount to a full revelation of Pattie's secret.

Ben took it in, and held his peace. Phibs had certainly had a surprise, made a discovery.

It was a very fine, warm evening. He went out, and took a turn round the garden, where the lime trees were coming into flower. And he took thought with himself. His agitation was not loud, but it was deep. He loved Pattie, and he had got a glimpse of the dreadful possibility that she was not for him; that her dear little words and sweet ways were but the survival of childish familiarity, and signified

nothing of what he had been hoping and expecting. If this were so, it would be a terrible collapse, indeed—a most complete overthrow.

He stood still, and stared at the gravel. Pattie's window did not look that way, but his sister's did, and she saw him. Miss Phœbe chose always to treat of lover's love as a lambent flame that, being unfed, would soon go out. Of married love she had a more respectful opinion. That was sacred. Her pity for Ben was therefore moderate. Of course, it is vexing not to get what you want, be it what it may, but the vexation does not last for ever. Her uppermost sentiment at the moment was that she trusted he might be mercifully preserved from making a fool of himself by crying too openly for what was denied him. As for Pattie's repentance and restiveness under her engagement, Miss Phœbe thought that of very small account. Mr. James Rufforth was a desirable and substantial match for her, and Mr. Gardner was not a father to be moved by idle whims and fickleness. It was very un-

likely that Pattie would be strong enough to defy them both, whatever her wish or will in the matter might be. Ben was comparatively a poor man, following a profession not of high mark in the esteem of opulent people. His sister decided in her own private mind that he would have had but a poor chance against Mr. James Rufforth with Pattie's friends and family, even had he been first in the field; and he had not entered for the race until this other man was in sight of the winning post.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT BEN SAID OF IT.

PATTIE'S excitement went down, and left her under the cold shade of reflection when she was alone. She was sorry she had spoken of James as she had done. She did not care for him; but as he cared enough for her to want to marry her, and held her pledge to that effect, no doubt she owed him a certain duty and respect with which her hasty words were inconsistent. Perhaps she ought to have told him, first of any one, how she must declare off her engagement because she did not love him; it would be very bad if he heard it in any round-about way from somebody else. She would write to her papa, to her mamma. No, she would do nothing—she would do what James was doing.

Pattie was perturbed, and exceedingly annoyed with James. Whatever had happened or was to happen, she should call his fault. She would not be blamed. He had been very silly and selfish in urging her to a promise against her will. And then to leave her hours in the train; and never to write to her, for a whole fortnight! Was that like a lover? Was that a pleasant prospect for a girl to marry on? In fact, James was wrapt up in business, and gave all his best mind to making money. He had neither taste nor leisure for the graces and observances of courtship and a refined life. He had bespoken for himself a wife, like a bale of raw merchandise to be wrought up by-and by, and meanwhile he was content to let her lie on the shelf. Pattie did not like to lie on the shelf. The opportunity of comparisons had been given her, and poor James had become odious. But it was his own fault.

In the height of her accusatory humour Mary Ann called Pattie to dinner. That humour dresses both face and figure with lively motion. Pattie looked beautiful, bright, clear,

spirited, as she came into the parlour where Ben and his sister stood together and silent. Ben held out his hand to her for a greeting, as his manner was after the day's absence, and he observed that she would not meet his eyes. But when they were at table, and he talked of South Kensington, and what they were going to see there presently, her courage was restored. Ben had conveyed to her, in a thousand ways, that she was lovely and delightful to him ; and he would have been but a dull, short-sighted wooer had he not discerned from time to time that she was pleased to know it. A blush, a shy glance, a rosy smile that expanded into a merry laugh of no meaning, set Ben almost at ease again, and quite confounded Phibs. What did Pattie intend by such behaviour? It was very naughty of her ; but she was only a child the other day, and you cannot put an old head on young shoulders. Miss Phœbe decided that it was of no use to be austere, and if she found fault she would probably get laughed at.

It was a very convenient method of dis-

posing of the evening to go to the conversazione at South Kensington. Pattie had not seen the museum, nor the collection of pictures. The rooms were not over-crowded with company, and so fresh and airy were the galleries and arcades that Miss Phœbe congratulated herself on having brought a wadded cloak with her. She took her seat on a crimson ottoman within hearing of the band, and was joined by an acquaintance who had much to say on things in general. When Ben saw his sister thus comfortably settled and amused, he proposed that Pattie should walk about with him, and see what was best worth seeing. Miss Phœbe dismissed them with a curt nod, and then watched them out of sight with affectionate perplexity.

Pattie held Ben's arm; the crown of her head was just on a level with his chin, and with the other hand she held back the sweeping folds of her white dress. So they passed beyond Miss Phœbe's ken, and sauntered hither and thither until they came to that picture of Mulready's that Ben wished Pattie to admire. Pattie did admire it, but with a countenance of

confusion. Had Miss Phœbe told him of her engagement after all?

Ben, looking down, beheld her guilty face: 'Pattie,' said he, 'you have something on your conscience. What is it? Confess, and, perhaps, I will absolve you.'

'I wish you could!' said she.

They went on further, and Ben spoke again: 'You used to bring your little troubles to me, and make me your champion and intercessor. Sometimes you pleaded with small, soft kisses, and sometimes you pulled my hair.'

'Oh, Ben!' Pattie put in remonstratingly.

'It is true, Pattie. Don't deny it. But come—what is on your mind—confess, confess.'

'It is nothing to you, Ben.'

'Nothing to me, when I love you, Pattie? Something is vexing you, and it is nothing to me? I liked your other way best, though you pulled hard. We will not be friends, then.' Ben assumed a lofty coolness and unconcern. Pattie looked up shyly, and laughed. He

allowed her almost to tire of pleading so before he looked down. She sighed, and he relented. His apprehensions were not very serious.

'It is really nothing to you, Ben. Only I am engaged to James Rufforth,' said she, very quietly.

Ben had imagined many things, but not that. And she appeared composed when she had told it. There was a noticeably long silence between them, which Ben broke by repeating in his kindest voice: 'Only you are engaged to James Rufforth. Since when, Pattie?'

'Since last April-Fool Day.'

'Well,' he said, 'I wish I had stood in James Rufforth's shoes last April-Fool Day.'

A wave of beautiful soft colour and light flowed over Pattie's face and neck, and her downcast eyes shone under the fair shadow of their broad lids. Ben saw it all, and was moved with pity and tenderness; but he refrained himself, and did not speak again. He called himself a friend of James Rufforth. He had accepted his hospitality, ridden his horses, shot with him on his father's moor. If Pattie was promised to this

other man, he must not interfere with his rights. James Rufforth was not a man to be idly interfered with. Rough, audacious, confident, he was likely to stand upon his rights with even violent determination, though he might have neglected to establish them by the delicate, assiduous care such rights necessitate with gentle minds.

Pattie and Ben found their way back to the place where they had left Miss Phœbe. She was alone now. Her talkative acquaintance had gone to assist at another entertainment. As the two came up, she observed a change. Pattie no longer held Ben's arm. She had a subdued, though not a sad face; and Ben had his air of everyday. The sister thought: 'She has told him. Ben has persuaded her to tell him.'

When they were at home, and Pattie had retired, she asked her brother if it was not so. Ben said: 'Yes,' and he did not understand it. 'She is not happy in the engagement, nor proud of it, apparently. What possessed her to

commit herself to it, Phibs, have you made that out?' he enquired.

'I fancy that she was overborne by the man's assurance, Ben. I caught a glimpse of him the day she came. He brought her to the door—a great, big fellow, with a red beard, and white teeth. Her heart is not it, that I do know—And really, Ben, he is more like a porter than a lover.' Thus far Phibs. And, on her brother's further demand, she gave him the few particulars that Pattie had given her.

'It is a cruel shame!' said Ben. And naturally it seemed the more cruel for the blow it gave himself.

After a silence of some minutes Miss Phœbe with sympathetic disconsolateness asked: 'What shall you do, Ben?'

'Sleep on it, Phibs. And so good-night, ma'am,' was his characteristic sturdy reply.

CHAPTER X.

PATTIE'S LOVERS.

THERE was no sign that Ben had not slept on it when he came to breakfast in the morning. Miss Phœbe and Pattie were alone together for five minutes before he appeared, and Miss Phœbe in a simple, matter of fact manner said: 'We are going to lose Ben for a day or two. He wants to take a run down to Oxford. He does that when he needs a little change.'

'I have always heard that Oxford is a beautiful city,' said Pattie.

Then Ben entered, as smart as a bridegroom, or the bright May morning. There was a pleasantness as of fresh air always about Ben; and the meal progressed cheerfully until Mary Ann brought in an unusually large delivery of letters and papers. Ben gathered them all up,

tossed the first to Phibs, and the next to Pattie.

'One for you, Pattie—two—three—and here is a heavy consignment—samples of wool probably—to your care, for James Rufforth, Esq.,' said he, impertinently.

This was very unkind. Poor Pattie's face grew as red as fire; she was so crest-fallen that she could not look up. She took her letters. One from her mother, one from a play-fellow, one from James. As she read the first her eyes dilated with astonishment, anger, terror, distress. She tore open James's, which did not contain many lines. But they were enough to raise her passion to a climax. Miss Phœbe was watching her with alarm. Ben's attention was totally distracted from his own correspondence. Pattie's tears were running over, her pretty white throat was swelling. She got up in a hurry to run out of sight, and upset her chair.

Ben stretched forth a hand to hold her back: 'What is it, Pattie?' But she plucked away her sleeve, and reached the door. He

cried after her: 'If you *will* go, take the wool-samples to comfort you, and consider that we are on tenter-hooks until we hear the latest intelligence of the wool-stapler.'

'How dare you, Ben? How can you?' whispered Phibs, reproachful, yet verging on laughter.

Pattie swept round like an April storm, and cast the two open letters on the table before him: 'Then read those,' said she, and was gone.

Ben let them lie, and was, perhaps, momentarily in a small degree ashamed. Pattie's fury was neither voluntary nor groundless. She was carried by it quite out of herself, or she would not have flung him those letters.

'Are you going to read them?' said his sister.

'What a variable joy she is—no fear of a monotonous life with Pattie,' was Ben's reflective, irrelevant answer.

'You treat the loss of her very coolly, Ben. I expected to see you quite down in the dumps.'

'Dumps will not win her: and mark, ma'am, she is not lost yet. Are we to read those letters, Phibs?'

'She gave you permission. You were abominably provoking, Ben. You must say good-bye to her before you go. Shall I call her down?'

'I will go up to her,' said he, abstractedly. Miss Phœbe observed that he frowned in speaking—a bad sign.

Ben was reading Mrs. Gardner's letter. She wrote to prepare her daughter for a requisition from her lover that they should be married at Midsummer: this was more hasty than she could have wished herself; but papa said there was nothing to wait for, and their dear child would soon be reconciled when it was over. James Rufforth's letter put the requisition with the brief emphasis of a master, who knows no reason why his will should not be law, whether with sweetheart or wife. He informed Pattie that his house was ready, and he had bought her drawing-room furniture in Paris; he announced his arrival in London for that day,

and proposed to call at the Corner House, and take her to the Lyceum to see Mr. Henry Irving play Hamlet that afternoon. It was Saturday. Ben was confounded by his assurance. Here was a lover who said neither with your leave, nor by your leave, but must and shall in the loudest imperative mood.

Miss Phœbe returned from her mission. 'You can go up to her in the parlour, Ben; but don't teaze her, poor child. She is crying bitterly. Give me the letters, I might as well know what it is all about.' Phibs did not think James Rufforth's letter so offensive. It was short, and very much to the point. Pattie was his dear little girl, and he was her affectionate friend who would tell her all his news when they met. 'I suppose he is fonder of talking than of writing. Pattie said he was a great talker,' said Miss Phœbe to herself. 'And he may be here to luncheon—that is well thought of—I must arrange with Specks.'

Ben Milner's inclination to teaze Pattie had evaporated when he went to bid her good-bye. There was fire in his face as well as in hers

now, and in his heart too. Midsummer was not much more than three weeks off. He rushed to the impetuous conclusion of telling his own tale, and pleading his own cause, there and then.

'Good-bye, Ben. You are going away till Monday,' Pattie said, holding out her hand with recovered dignity, and a most sweet, forgiving pathos in her velvet eyes.

'Yes, till Monday, Pattie. By that time James Rufforth will have been and gone, and I shall be better out of the way?'

'Yes, Ben, if you think so.' Pattie's soft lips trembled.

Ben kept her hand: 'Don't cry, dear—*love me.* You were cheated into that engagement, and he cannot hold you to it against your will.' And Pattie not resisting, Ben drew her to him, and kissed her, and whispered words so sweet and kind, that the roses of her face were fanned to life again thereby, and her response, though silent, was sufficient. They were sure to pay for these pleasant moments, and for that

reason we will forbear moralising on their crude, imperfect views of obligation and honour. None so blessed as they that lovely hour. Let them linger and be glad in it. And let the world be forgotten.

Their first visitation came in the shape of Phibs—cross. 'Oh, you need not tell me! I know all about it. I am not so blind that I cannot see through a closed door what is going on, when Ben has missed his train, and breakfast is kept standing on the table until Pattie is at leisure to go and finish hers,' was the peremptory method in which she checked their beneficent offer to take her into their confidence, and make her a sharer of their happiness. She sounded sarcastic, but there was no body in her wrath. Ben laughed mischievously; Pattie only blushed.

'Come away, Pattie, and finish your breakfast,' said he, leading her off by the arm.

'Yes, go. I want to dust my china, and should be in your way. I can tell you that I think that other young man very unfairly

treated, and I don't believe that you have heard the last of him.'

'No,' said Pattie, and but for the courage of true, warm, willing love she would have feared to fail in that encounter which impended. With what thankfulness would she have evaded it, had that been possible. But James had given no address to which she could telegraph a plea in excuse: he had made so sure of a welcome at his friend Milner's house, that he had directed letters to be sent from his agent's to meet him there.

Ben hovered about Pattie, and made her fortify herself for the task of managing poor James. They conspired against him, planning to have Mrs. Nowse to lunch, who would keep him engaged in conversation. Then Phibs, in the interests of conventional propriety, would accompany them to the theatre. Pattie must never be left alone with him, and thus tender perplexities need not arise, and his fate might be communicated to him by letter. Ben undertook to acquaint Mr. Gardner with his own pretensions, and Pattie was to confess her

change of lovers by post to her mother. When all was settled, Ben was more than half of a mind to revoke his intention of going to Oxford, but Pattie bade him go. She said she should pass through her ordeal more coolly, if she knew that he was at a distance. The one thing in James that made her afraid of him was his hot temper. Ben objected that this was like running away from the face of his rival; but Pattie urged that at this stage of their rivalry discretion was the only part of valour Ben could display. And Miss Phœbe coming in to warn him of the flight of time, backed her judgment, and he was got off safe to Paddington.

Then Pattie shut herself up to gather force by reflecting. If Ben was more present with her than the lover whom she did not love, that was but in the nature of things. Once Miss Phœbe looked in on her to say: 'Pattie, don't forget the few lines to your mamma. There will be no time after lunch, and the country-post closes at five.' And again to announce: 'Mrs.

Nowse has come, and has brought her noisy little dog. She thought it might be a help.'

Pattie's letter was written then, and she had re-dressed herself in black silk. Black did not become her, but it seemed suitable to the half-mourning circumstances, and pale pink bows gave artistic expression to her comeliness.

'What a grave apparition!' said Mrs. Nowse, when she appeared in the parlour; and instantly Taffy began to bark, and jump up, and hurry-scurry about the room, rendering useful remarks and needful questions equally inaudible. He was likely to be a very great help indeed, that energetic little dog.

Miss Phœbe was nervous. She had put on black also, and her second-best cap, after dusting her china, and she had ordered a very nice luncheon. So far her duty was done; but a sad shake of her head conveyed to Pattie how far she was from being at ease in the anticipation of Mr. James Rufforth's arrival. 'Let us sit down and do something, or we shall be all in a quake and quandary when he comes,' said she. 'Pattie, I advise you to employ yourself;

get your lace-work. Mrs. Nowse, would Taffy hold his tongue if you took him on your lap?'

Taffy was soon silenced when the three ladies were seated. Mrs. Nowse had brought no work, so she talked, and saved other people the trouble; which was, indeed, what she came for. It was within a few minutes of one o'clock when a peal of the door-bell, and a thundering knock, made Miss Phœbe spring off her chair. Pattie too. They exchanged glances of mutual commiseration and encouragement. Mrs. Nowse maintained her composure, and set Taffy down, with a whispered intimation that he was at liberty to welcome the stranger joyfully. And Taffy did.

Poor James was a very tall man, and large in proportion. His complexion was sanguine, and his beard full and wide spreading. Pattie Gardner had been told that she might be proud of her young man very often. But Pattie did not see it. She was not proud of him at all. He was big and clumsy, and wore the most dreadful clothes. *That* his sincerest friends could not deny. He had on now a suit of

coarse, brown home-spun, country-made, and of a texture quite bearish ; and he filled far too much space in the rather small room. When Taffy, in obedience to instructions, scampered round his feet, bounded into the air to lick his hands, and made sets and short runs at him, vociferous with delight, he appeared excessively disconcerted. For every man has his weakness ; and his was a terror of little dogs, as infallible vehicles of hydrophobia.

Mrs. Nowse, always indulgent to her favourite, put no restraint on his enthusiasm, and Pattie said, laughing : 'Taffy and you might be old friends, James. Where have you met before?' The spectacle of his alarm had all at once overcome hers, and the spirit of fun instantly possessed her instead. She shook hands in the most cheerful frame, bade Taffy be quiet, and let somebody else be heard, and effected an introduction of the young man to Miss Phœbe first, and then to their other visitor. James was thankful to be sat down and able to gather himself together ; for Taffy kept up a low growl, punctuated by interjec-

tions of suppressed emotion, each one of which caused him a thrill.

'So very odd!' said Mrs. Nowse. 'I never knew him in such glee with a perfect stranger before. He was once lost for a day and a half, *stolen*—if you ask me the plain truth—but I was so truly happy to give the man ten shillings who pretended to have found him and brought him home, that I asked no questions.'

James was much too distracted to discern the flattering implication that Taffy might have made his acquaintance when in the society of dog-stealers, but Pattie took it in, and laughed with full, overflowing laughter. Miss Phœbe gazed at her in wonder and reprehension. Could this be the Pattie who shed tears at breakfast-time? and this the impatient lover who wanted to marry her at Midsummer?

Mary Ann created an opportune diversion by coming to say that luncheon was on the table; and James, as he rose to his feet, said to his dear young country-woman with a consciously foolish look of entreaty: 'Pattie, if you love me, let that little dog be shut out.'

Mrs. Nowse demurred pathetically to the suggestion; he would whine at the door all the time, she said; he could not bear to be parted from her.

'Fudge!' ejaculated Miss Phœbe, who hated persecution. Pattie also was a feeling soul in a measure. Taffy could go down to Specks in the kitchen, with orders to make him comfortable. He went willingly, led by his nose, and James Rufforth was himself again.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE PLAY: AND AFTER.

THEY were four at the round table, which was very tastefully spread. James Rufforth saw nothing but Pattie's face opposite, so sweet, so bright. It inspired him with the finest spirits, as soon as Taffy was safe. He shook out his napkin, set back his head, caressed his magnificent beard, and contemplated her with sovereign approval for a minute or longer. And then he began to talk, assuming that their mutual relations were recognised and admired by the two elder ladies who formed their audience. The dimples of fun and mischief that played about Pattie's lips encouraged him, and only Miss Phœbe felt what treachery there was in letting him flow on in such simple,

triumphant confidence that he was edifying and delighting them.

'Do you know the furniture warehouses in Paris, Miss Milner! Ah, perhaps not? You have never been out of England. It is to your credit. St. Paul says, women should be keepers at home, does not he, Pattie? I made a satisfactory investment last week. A complete suit of ebony for our drawing room; not ebonised wood, but real ebony, inlaid with ivory. It will please you, Pattie. The covers and window-curtains I chose of crimson satin damask—very rich.'

Pattie looked as cool as a cucumber, unmoved by these splendours: 'You are very extravagant, James,' said she.

'Not at all; besides my father pays for it. Furniture ought to last a lifetime. And our new house will do justice to good furniture.' He nodded to her with friendly complacency, and changed the subject. He changed the subject half a dozen times, but kept the ball of conversation always in his own hands. 'I came up from the Isle of Wight this morning:

perhaps you have not guessed that. The sun and waves were dancing like diamonds. I crossed from Havre to Southampton on Thursday night, that I might drop down for a day on the island, and look out for a house. I found exactly what I wanted at Chinelyn. If you die there, Pattie, you will have to be carried five miles to bury. They have shut up the beautiful churchyard.'

'I shall hope not to give them the trouble, James,' said Pattie, blushing. James was planning, then, to convey her to the Isle of Wight at Midsummer. 'I shall take care you don't,' thought she, and considered the allusion disagreeable.

'Now, young people, if you mean to be in time for the opening of the play, you ought to think of moving,' said Mrs. Nowse, who had kept her eye on the clock.

'Yes. Go, Pattie, and put on your bonnet,' said James.

Miss Phœbe left the room with her, and returned in her best plumes. Mary Ann was in attendance to receive instructions. With

polite hospitality Miss Phœbe asked the visitor if he would come back after the play, and spend the evening; but James declined. A long evening with two ladies, albeit one was Pattie, would have been irksome to his masculine mind; and he pleaded another engagement, but confusedly, as if he had none.

Pattie entered, buttoning her gloves, and from a word Miss Phœbe spoke to her James understood that they were to have her escort to the theatre. He had not counted on this, and thought it unnecessary; but Miss Phœbe was quite equal to the occasion, and accepted his arm on the way to the underground station, from which they were to go to Charing Cross. She also took it again, walking up the Strand, letting Pattie walk on her other hand, or follow behind, an arrangement more agreeable to her feelings than to her lover's.

Pattie had never been in a theatre before, and Miss Phœbe's visits were so rare that this one was an event. A hushed excitement possessed them both, as they were conducted to seats immediately fronting the stage. Pattie

was put in the furthest chair, the most central, and the best for seeing, and Miss Phœbe schemed for the next. But here James felt that her intervention might reasonably stop; and in his manner of a country beau, he whispered, 'I'll divide you ladies, if you please;' and so he sat by Pattie.

The girl's face wore a modest glow of delight and surprise at the novelty of the scene, and when the music began she communicated her pleasure to James by a kind, little nod. Her thoughts were full of the play, which she knew by heart—Ophelia being the play to her, and the engraving from Mr. Millais' Ophelia, drowned and dead, the true Ophelia. Her neighbour on the other hand was a young lady with a pretty wooden face, nicely coloured; who never winked from the first word to the last. But poor Pattie, unused to violent emotions, felt with the actors, and vibrated even to tears. What she did not feel was terror of the ghost. Science and modern investigation have extracted the spiritual essence from ghosts, which have been made too much a joke of to freeze our

marrow any more. That tall, tiny, stalking figure was not awful to her, and she wished Hamlet had met him more like a man. That was the only bit of criticism Pattie was guilty or capable of. She wanted the play with the ghost left out, or as a shadow cast on the wall and a voice in the air, heard but not seen—a phantom invisible, except in the haunted faces of the beholders. But when Ophelia and Laertes entered she listened with all her ears, and knitted her pretty brows, and flushed and paled; and on Polonius, with his few precepts for his son, she smiled approval, but felt him hard upon his daughter. The story moved quickly for her. Laertes was gone—Hamlet, mad or feigning—no actor, but the very man, as he sate at weary ease, meditating his philosophy of life and death. And then that tender waking to Ophelia's presence, and her re-delivery of his gifts to the Prince. James noticed Pattie's hand lifted furtively again and again to wipe her tears. But the fierce passion scared her; she did not comprehend it. What touched her to the quick was

the scene where Ophelia comes in singing and strewing flowers: 'There's rosemary, that's for remembrance, *pray, love, remember*: and there's pansies, that's for thoughts.' Perhaps she was more glad than sorry when the play ended. It was a tremendous first plunge for a novice. The strain tired her.

'You are too young to enjoy it as it deserves, Pattie, but it is grand,' James said as they walked away. 'Wait till I have brought you up to London for half a dozen seasons.' He was more pleased with her than if she had been less fresh and immature; he was very good-natured, and meant the best towards her that man could at that moment. Pattie was half ashamed to be so ungrateful.

Mr. James Rufforth conveyed the two ladies back to Charing Cross, and then left them, under an engagement to go to the Corner House the following afternoon, and walk with Pattie in Kensington Gardens. Miss Phœbe was quiet, reserved and cautious in her demeanour on the way home, and at tea. Later in the evening she relaxed; and at a hint that

late events might be discussed, Pattie, who longed for the relief of conversation, spoke.

'James does not care for me, does he, Miss Phœbe?' said she, with much gaiety of tone and manner.

Miss Phœbe was not for a moment divided between her truthful instincts and a weak leaning towards compliment. 'He does not care for you as dear Ben does; but that is not to say he will suffer no pain or mortification in missing what he is reckoning upon. He is both proud and fond of you in a sense; but perhaps he is not a man who will ever seek companionship in a wife. I am afraid he will regard her as a useful and handsome housekeeper, and leave her very much to herself. Now Ben requires sympathy in his pursuits, though it be only mine. Still, I hope you know what you are doing, Pattie, in throwing this young man over. He is in the way to grow rich, and that will never be Ben's fortune.'

Pattie's sweet cheek owned to the feelings of her heart by a delicate blush: 'I have no

ambition to wear finer clothes than my neighbours,' said she. 'Mamma is very happy in a cambric dress everyday, and a tussore on Sunday, and I believe she has only two brooches. She would not forego any simple pleasure for herself or us for the sake of greater show, and mamma's way is good enough for me.'

'It is a pity you had not presence of mind to put Mr. James Rufforth down on the spot,' Miss Phœbe said, with an air of forethought not free from uncertainty.

'He was rash and foolish to think of me,' Pattie answered in a spirited way. 'It was all of a sudden. I don't believe that he had ever given me a thought before Jem's wedding in March.'

It was at Jem's wedding, as Miss Phœbe was aware, that her brother Ben had been fatally smitten. 'Everything must have a beginning,' said she. 'But I can see that Mr. James Rufforth is loud and overbearing.'

'I could choose him a wife much more suitable, if he would let me,' Pattie continued, coolly. She is a beauty who would make two of me,

and in his heart of hearts he prefers her. I know he does.' The accent of conviction was in her voice, the light of triumph in her eyes.

'How do you know it, Pattie? Who is it? Pity he does not take her if she will have him.'

Pattie would not mention her name, but she seemed much pleased with some view that had opened to her. 'She is his first love, to whom he has always returned after every flirtation. He will return to her permanently after his caprice for me. I should like to bet you something upon it, Miss Phœbe.'

'Pattie, dear, be moderate. I don't like betting either—but for once in a way, and as you wish it.'

The bet was, that before Christmas came again Pattie would be asked to dance at James Rufforth's wedding with somebody else—a pound to a penny in gloves.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT BEFEL ON SUNDAY.

PATTIE'S first thought at waking the next morning was that at about that hour the old postman would be putting her letter to her mother, and Ben's letter to her father, in at the open kitchen window at home—his summer custom always. It was a wide casemented window, deep sunk in festoons of honeysuckle, very odoriferous later in the year, and bushy already. Pattie could see the lame old man in his red velvet waistcoat halting outside, and Hannah the cook leaving her preparations for breakfast for five minutes' gossip. She was in much greater commotion of spirits about what reception the letters might have with her parents than about James himself. He might come and go, without disturbing her equanimity at all now.

She had put him back into his old original place of friend of the family ; and there let him bide, and make no pretension to be lover of hers any more.

Mrs. Gardner was in the breakfast-room before anybody else. She looked pleased at Pattie's letter by her plate, and let it lie unopened until her husband and the boys were all there, and served with tea and coffee to their liking. Mr. Gardner had been round the garden already, and had brought in a beautiful half-blown tea-rose—the first of the season. He offered it to his wife's acceptance, and then went to his place. Several letters awaited him, but he singled out Ben Milner's at once, and read that.

'What is the matter, papa ?' one of the boys asked at the change his visage underwent.

'Nothing amiss with Pattie, I hope ?' said her mother, taking up her own epistle.

'No, the little puss ! Give me the butter, Tom. Ted, run out and tell Briggs I shall want him to drive me to the railway to catch the London train. I must go up to town to-day.'

Mrs. Gardner had mastered Pattie's meaning

in five seconds. 'To-day, dear—must you go to-day?' she said turning her steady wifely eyes on the hurried countenance of her husband. He nodded. 'But you will be back soon?' He said, Yes; he should be back to-morrow, and bring Pattie home with him. The boys stared. Pattie was supposed to have gone for a longer visit. Away from the youngsters the father and mother spoke freely of what had occurred. Mr. Gardner was seriously put out.

'You will not be angry with her?' pleaded the mother.

'No. But I shall be firm.' Firmness was the moral characteristic on which Mr. Gardner prided himself.

Mrs. Gardner felt and looked sad, but she was too wise to be urgent in the heat of the moment. 'There can be no marriage at midsummer, that is certain,' was her sole rejoinder.

'Pshaw! the sooner the better,' snapped her husband. But that, of course, meant nothing. It was only testiness.

Mr. Gardner went to the train, and his wife went to church, and solaced her heart there.

That Pattie should be brought home, and away from the Milners' house, was inevitable under the circumstances, but it seemed unkind to cut her visit that she was enjoying short. Her mother was not, however, troubled past hoping a happy solution of Pattie's dilemma. She had never been able to contemplate James Rufforth with satisfaction as a future son-in-law; but to Ben Milner she was very partial, and her approval secretly agreed with her daughter's choice. Nevertheless, the dilemma was grave enough to give her momentary pangs of great uneasiness throughout the day. They were an affectionate family. Pattie had never been in rebellion before, and might be subdued. And James Rufforth's position was strong while her father backed him. The elements of disquiet were more than sufficient to vex the mother's heart.

While Mr. Gardner was creeping up to London by the slow Sunday train through nine dusty and irksome hours, Ben Milner was disporting himself cheerfully in Oxford. He had

left friends there who were delighted to see him. He dined with one on Saturday evening, and breakfasted with another on Sunday morning, and went with him to the University Sermon. In the afternoon he lounged about the beautiful gardens of Worcester College with one of the Fellows, formerly his tutor, and talked of the reforms desirable and otherwise that the authorities were instituting, and of men of their time who were out in the world, and doing ill or well there. It was drowsy and delicious on the soft lawns. The birds sang, the lakelet shone mirror-like under the drooping shadows, figures passed noiseless under the trees, appeared and disappeared through the dark door-ways. The Fellow discoursed with energy of things that had a deep personal interest for himself. He was making his life there. His gown was rusty, his hands were white and lean, his hair was grizzled. Ben's ears heard him without understanding. His thoughts had flown away to the little garden under the limes at the Corner House, where his sister liked to sit out on a warm summer Sunday afternoon. He pictured her with a good book

in her favourite spot; and Pattie, not far off, also pretending to half-an-hour with one of the best authors.

They were not there, however. Miss Phœbe had made a sacrifice of herself, so far as to insist on giving her attendance to the young people, when James Rufforth arrived to redeem his promise of taking Pattie for a walk in Kensington Gardens; though Pattie had begged her not to go, unless it were agreeable to herself. It was undoubtedly a trial to Miss Phœbe, who, while retaining her provincial accent and early habits in-doors, had outwardly conformed herself to the world she lived in. James attracted the eye of everybody. He had the air of a man who is his own master, and perhaps, the master of other men, which carries its own stamp of high respectability; but can any one tell why, in this era of grace and simplicity, he chose to wear a vast buff waistcoat, and a blue frock-coat with gold buttons? He was tall and strong like a tower; there was a light wind that tossed his beard playfully; and he walked at a business-pace, which made Miss Phœbe's gait, as she held his

arm, a gentle trot. Pattie accommodated herself more readily to his measured stride, for she was used to walk with her father; but the elder lady was soon out of breath, and was understood to gasp: 'At this rate we shall put a girdle round the park in twenty minutes!'

Opportunely at that crisis they met sauntering towards them a dear old French lady, with whom Miss Phœbe was friends. They embraced with ardour, and a bench under a shady tree being in the way, Pattie implored them to sit and rest: 'James and I will go as far as the fountains and return,' she said; and Miss Phœbe was only too thankful for any excuse to part company with James's seven-leagued boots.

The young people moved on, dividing the fashionable stream right and left. James Rufforth kept the middle of the way, as if he were in the habit of it. Pattie had recovered her buoyancy in the sunshine, and she passed her pleasant remarks on the people they met as if her mind were altogether comfortable. James asked her to give an account of how she had spent the time since he brought her to

London ; and she complied readily, not feeling as if she had anything to conceal. In speaking of the drive in the park with Mrs. Lowther, she did not judge it needful to mention that Ben Milner was there (her guilty conscience caused her to avoid Ben's name), but added, as suddenly recollecting the incident : 'And I got quite a start, James; for I thought I saw you in the crowd, though I knew you must be still abroad. I looked back, and you looked back, and seemed to catch my eye and evade it, and go away—and so I lost you.' James's face was turned upwards and out of Pattie's sight. But she did not raise her eyes. She was talking for talking's sake, and because he had bidden her: she ran on : 'If I believed in 'fetches' or 'doubles' I should be afraid for you—but I don't. Are you superstitious, James?'

James did not answer. Then Pattie looked up. His florid cheek was whitened, and he was staring hard at her. Pattie looked down again precipitately, and, as if she had witnessed nothing to startle or surprise her, said : 'No, I don't think you are—you are afraid of little

dogs, and of little mongrel dogs the most.' And she ceased her prattle.

James all at once accelerated his pace, as if he were walking for a wager. Pattie kept up with him as long as she could, but was forced to say, at last: 'James, this quick march is too hurried for me—'

'Am I tiring you, Pattie?' said he. 'Poor little girl! we will go back to the old ladies then. Had my "double" bear's clothes on, or was it dressed like Sunday?' There was a furtive anxiety in the manner of this inquiry, but Pattie did not think of it. Later she remembered it, and wondered it had not struck her more at the time.

'I could not see what sort of clothes it wore, for it was in the crowd; but what made me sure it was not you was a crimson necktie with long ends. You never wear a crimson necktie—but the likeness was wonderful; and especially in the turning away, it seemed to watch whether I should call it,—a very odd look for a stranger.'

'But more odd still if it had been myself,

Pattie. I should have come without calling,' said her lover.

'I suppose so,' Pattie answered; and then she said it was his turn to give her news of his journey, of which he had told her nothing yet.

He began with less fluency than was his wont, and never got far on with his story, which he interrupted to ask: 'Did you expect a letter from me before I came home again, Pattie?'

'Yes, James. I thought most likely you would write to me,' was her cool reply.

'I wrote to your father instead. The foreign way prevents misunderstandings in matters of bargain and sale. I hope the terms of the treaty are accepted? But these are preliminaries—mere preliminaries. You need not speak.'

Pattie did speak, however. 'Go on with your travels, James. You had reached Paris, —tell me how long you stayed there—'

'Three weeks and ten days, and then proceeded forthwith to Parimaribo!' Pattie reddened, and her heart jumped. She fancied her

curiosity had annoyed him, but that he must be in fun. He quickened his pace again, and there was a sort of rushing, cleaving way upon him, which drew attention more and more. People stood and watched after the two had passed. A policeman turned, and followed them at a little distance. Pattie became conscious of observation, and tried to moderate his racing speed.

'James, please do walk gently. We are not tearing about the wolds,' she said.

He answered her with a prodigious oath.

'That is very polite!' said she, and lifted her eyes with fearless, amazed reproach.

'The sun is like a burning glass. Come back to the water, Pattie,' he said, but continued straight forward along the path they had been following. The ebullition seemed to have done him good. He was shy and ashamed, and cast doubtful glances at Pattie, who would not encounter them, but walked with her head in the air. He muttered a few inaudible words, laughing inwardly. Pattie did not invite him to talk any more. She was affronted

and intrepid. He was sullen and chafing. They had quite the appearance of a lovers' quarrel when they came up to the two ladies sitting on the bench; and nobody entreated the young man to give them any more of his society.

He said to Miss Phœbe: 'I have no objection to shake hands with an enemy; but my engagements are numerous, and I must wish you good evening, ladies. Good evening, ladies. Good evening, ladies.' He bowed with exaggerated courtesy to each one, and then, pushing through the shrubs that skirted the walk on the inner side, he struck across the grass towards the park very swiftly. The policeman made a short cut to intercept him, but James was in advance, though in view. He stooped, picked up what was probably a stone, poised his great stature to take aim, and flung it with might and vengeance. Another policeman, coming in the opposite direction, ran up to remonstrate: 'Sir, that is dangerous. What are you about?' cried he, checking his course peremptorily.

'Rehearsing a scene in a play,' said James, and thrust him aside as if he were a child.

The second policeman hurried forward to reinforce his comrade: 'That gentleman's friends will have to look sharp after him afore long, I'm thinking,' said the first.

'He's had a difference with a young woman, just now,' said the second. 'I suppose he was making a shy with a stone at the other fellow.'

This seemed an adequate explanation of his fantastic violence to the guardians of the public safety, and James Rufforth was allowed to go on his way without further molestation.

The ladies were not so soon composed.

'Mais il est fou, absolument fou!' cried old Madame with emphatic gesture.

'What have you been doing to him, Pattie? Telling him the truth? He has crushed my hand to a mummy,' said Miss Phœbe; and her glove being removed, it was seen that the one brilliant ring she wore had cut into the flesh, and drawn blood.

'I have vexed him by wanting to know how

long he stayed in Paris,' Pattie replied with cool indignation.

'Only that? Some men hate to be questioned—you must always wait till they wish to tell. They are capable of bidding their wives hold their tongues. If your James Rufforth is like that, Pattie, you are well rid of him, though he were as rich as a Jew.'

'Mais, oui!' added Madame. 'Que les Anglais sont drôles.'

Mr. Gardner arrived at King's Cross only a few minutes before eight o'clock. He took his bag in his hand, and made his way to the great hotel close by. Whether to see his daughter that night or not was the question. He was jaded, and heated with his long journey, his vexation and his perplexity. He washed, re-dressed, and dined upon it. Then it was nine o'clock, or nearer the quarter past. Yet he decided that a drive in the cool and dusk of the evening would be good for him. He took a hansom, and drove to the Corner House. It was then close upon ten o'clock. Miss Phœbe and Pattie had been to church, had come home again, had

supped, had performed their evening devotions with Specks and Mary Ann, and were thinking of bed, when the door-bell rang sharply.

Pattie blushed. Phibs smiled: 'It is dear Ben come back from Oxford! I thought it probable he might, but I did not mention it, lest there should be a disappointment,' cried his sister, and ran out on the landing to meet him.

But it was not Ben's voice in the hall. It was a strange voice inquiring for Mr. Milner, and Mary Ann replying that Mr. Milner went to Oxford yesterday, and had not returned.

'It is papa!' whispered Pattie fearfully, laying a hand on Miss Phœbe's arm.

They listened, still as mice now. Mr. Gardner might be considering what to do or say next, for there was a silence.

At last he asked: 'Have the ladies retired?'

'If they have not, sir, they are about retiring. Visitors does not often call at this hour of a Sunday night,' replied Mary Ann.

Specks, with her candle on the way to bed, stopped to add her more authoritative voice—

she knew that her mistress would be listening above, and would call out to arrest the visitor's departure if necessary: 'Perhaps, sir, you'll be so kind as leave your name, and come in the morning. Misses is tirid, I know.'

'Very good—it is of no great consequence. Tell Miss Gardner that her father is in town, and that she must not leave the house to-morrow until she has seen me.' And then the door was shut, locked, bolted, barred.

'What a reprieve!' gasped Pattie. And then she ran back into the parlour, and laughed, and softly clapped her hands.

Miss Phœbe was rather dismayed. 'I hope Ben will think of coming by an early train,' said she, anxiously.

'I am not afraid,' said Pattie. 'I shall tell papa how James behaved to-day, and put it to him, as a loving father, whether he can really wish me to marry a man with whom I should go in fear of my life.' Pattie had not told James's misdemeanours in full to Miss Phœbe, but she did not contemplate having any reserves with her father.

Miss Phœbe kissed Pattie on both cheeks. She had grown quite fond of her. 'Well, love, I hope you will be able to sleep, but I doubt for myself. These contradictions are very trying to all concerned. Still, when the choice lies between such a wild bull as James Rufforth, and dear Ben who is gentleness itself, except in the way of fun, I don't suppose you can hesitate long. God bless you, Pattie, and Ben too. Good-night, dear.'

Pattie slumbered as if the blessing were not evoked in vain.

CHAPTER XIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

'I THINK I shall take papa to the Academy,' Pattie stated calmly as she sat at breakfast the next morning.

'I am glad you are in such good courage, Pattie. I should shake in your shoes,' replied Miss Phœbe.

'I am not ashamed of what I am doing—that is why my courage is good,' said Pattie. 'And James's impatience has made me desperate. To be married at midsummer, indeed! I have had scarcely any young time at all yet—I do not want to be invested with a key-basket, and the care of a husband, within three months of leaving school.'

Miss Phœbe rather demurred. 'I don't expect that Ben will wish to wait very long.

You see, Pattie, he is not quite so young as you are. I daresay life looks interminable from your point of view. I have forgotten when I was eighteen; but the years tread very fast on each other's heels now.'

Pattie was silent and thoughtful. If it were Ben it might be different. But as for James —there was no hope.

Miss Phœbe made out from 'Bradshaw' that Ben could not be up in town from Oxford before half-past ten, and she feared that he might stop at the Institution, and not come home at all until five or six, when he could anticipate a happy evening with a clear conscience, and in this event Mr. Gardner would have to be encountered without his supporting presence. As the morning advanced every wheel that rolled round the corner made Miss Phœbe hot.

Pattie discreetly went into retreat to keep cool, and free from nervous contagion; and when about eleven o'clock Mary Ann announced in a whisper that Mr. Gardner was come and was in the parlour by himself, she

folded up her lace-work, and ran down to embrace him without over much trepidation.

Her cheeks were in full glow, but her eyes were as radiant, and there was no invitation to tyranny in her kisses or her venturesome inquiry: 'Why, papa dear, what brings you up to London?'

'You know very well, you naughty Puss!' was the paternal reply. And then they sat down, and looked at each other.

Mr. Gardner felt at a loss for new sentiments suitable to the occasion, so he said: 'I shall be very firm with you, Pattie. You do not know what is for your good.'

'But I have an idea, papa; and you must listen to reason before you make up your mind what there is to be firm about. I mean to convince you that you are deceived.'

'I shall not argue with you, Pattie. You always had a tongue like a lawyer. From a very little child you had the trick of making the thing you wanted seem the thing you ought to have.'

'Papa dear, there is no argument in me—Only I am determined I won't marry James!'

'You have promised, Pattie.'

'No, papa, you promised for me; and James presumed to take the rest for granted—And to talk of midsummer! Well, perhaps it is a relief to get rid of the sword hanging over my head.' Pattie paused, and sighed deeply.

Mr. Gardner was rigid with firmness. 'Go on. Say out all that you have to say, and then I will answer you.'

Pattie looked lovely, leaning a little forward, her folded hands on her knees, and her voice full of tender, proud expostulation: 'Just consider, papa, how you would like such a sweetheart yourself—I did not write it in a letter because it seemed silly—but when James brought me to London he left me with a clergyman and two old ladies, and went and enjoyed himself in a smoking carriage. All the while he was abroad he never sent me one single line. And yesterday he swore at me—for nothing that I know of unless it were

for begging him to walk more gently, or for asking how long he stayed in Paris.'

'Swore at you, Pattie?' said her father, relaxing in his utter astonishment.

'Yes, papa. Is it customary for lovers to swear at ladies they wish to marry at midsummer? Or is it a little peculiarity of James's? Have I not heard somebody say he has "the very devil of a temper"?—Well, it is true. He has.'

Mr. Gardner's hair retained its natural wave of fawn and silver, but if it had done as heroic hair does it would have stood on end. Pattie, looking the picture of meekness, and making a quotation like that—substantiating it too, on her own authority, on her own experience! Her father had to take a few turns about the room before he recovered firmness enough to give any sort of answer.

'This is very extraordinary,' said he, reseating himself. 'I hardly know how to believe it, Pattie.'

'Indeed, you may say so, papa. I have scarcely recovered from it myself.'

'Perhaps he did not *swear*, Pattie. How do you know? Tell me exactly what he said.'

'If I am any judge, papa, it was a good round oath—and I should prefer to tell it to mamma.'

'You are no judge, Pattie.'—Mr. Gardner did not press her, however, to repeat this good round oath. He looked out of the window into the garden. Then he walked to the other window, and looked out into the road, and finally he announced: 'I have come to take you home, Pattie.—Yes, Puss, it is your affair has brought me all the way to London, when I would much rather have rested quiet on Sunday.'

'To take me home, papa?—Oh, I was promising myself to take you to the Academy,' cried Pattie, grieved in earnest now, and all remonstrance.

'There is no Academy for you or me to-day—Go and pack up.'

'Papa, it is impossible! I cannot pack up

all in a minute. And some of my things are at the laundress's.'

'Never mind them—leave them for the young woman who let me in to pack up. Your mother will lend you a night-cap. You are going down to Monksburn this afternoon with me. There are other reasons for your naughtiness besides James's swearing—perhaps you provoked him? And I have no desire to meet Ben Milner just at present. Miss Milner I will see—if she will see me. And now go, and do as I bid you—Get ready for a start—The express train is at three.'

Pattie humbled herself to stern necessity, and sought Miss Phœbe with her father's message. Phibs was wrath. She declined to see Mr. Gardner. 'Indeed, Pattie, I could not—ten to one I should break down crying. I really have no dignity where my feelings are hurt, and they are very much hurt by his taking you away.'

Pattie kissed and cooed over her, and turned consoler herself, who needed consolation. She made up sweet, kind farewells to Ben,

hoping to see him yet before she went. But the fatal hour did not delay, nor did he come. Her box was packed by Mary Ann, and she left the Corner House in tears. But, the parting over, she did not afflict her father with them. She could not sulk; she forgave him. People travelling down to the North in the same carriage remarked them as a thoughtful kind father and pretty affectionate daughter, going into the country after a pleasant holiday. And as Pattie drew near home her thoughts were more happy than the reverse.

Miss Phœbe nursed her wrath and kept it warm until Ben arrived from business, and she went to meet him with a dolorous countenance. 'You have come home to an empty house, Ben. Mr. Gardner has been here, and has carried Pattie away. Poor pet, how she cried! 'A heart of stone might have been touched to see her,' she told him.

Ben whistled: 'Whew!' glanced at the clock, rushed to his sister's blotting-book, and began to write very fast.

'You will just save the post if you are quick, and she will feel the comfort of a letter,' said Phibs softly, and she sat down and watched Ben's pen running a race against time. She warned him once, she warned him twice, and then to herself she murmured: 'Too late! But he can put on another stamp.' She was immensely relieved when Ben closed his letter—snatched his hat, and ran off to the district-office with it himself. He would go much faster than Mary Ann—As if he would have trusted Mary Ann!

When Ben returned he produced three stall tickets for Drury Lane. 'I promised myself to take Pattie and you to see Salvini in "Othello" to-night—Not to be outdone by James Rufforth, who carried you to see Irving in "Hamlet" on Saturday.'

Miss Phœbe eyed the tickets wistfully. 'I should enjoy going, Ben. So would she, had she been spared to us, pretty, dear thing. Oh, Ben, she *is* pretty! and she left more messages for you than I can remember. You must imagine them. Send round, and ask young

Pensill to come with us. He does not get a treat very often—'

'All right, Phibs. "Shall we, wasting in despair," deny ourselves 'cause Pattie 'll not be there? Ring the bell.'

Enter Mary Ann. 'Mary Ann, you know where Mr. Pensill lives?'

'I know where he *lodges*, Sir. The little artist-gentleman.'

'Precisely so. The little artist-gentleman. Ask for himself. Give him Miss Milner's love, and will he step in, and eat a bit of dinner with her, and take her to the play afterwards?

'Yes, Sir. And if he's not there?'

'Bring your message back. Don't leave it.'

Miss Phœbe stood gazing at her brother in sheer bewilderment. 'You are a miracle, Ben—nothing short of a miracle. Anybody else would have been sorry and put out. I assure you Pattie shed tears.'

'If I had been on the spot, Phibs, I should have availed myself of my privilege to kiss them away.'

'No, you wouldn't, Ben—not with her father there.'

'A fig for her father! Love is on my side. Don't worry and distress yourself, Phibs —Pattie is mine. If not to-day, then to-morrow. I know whom I am trusting.'—Re-enter Mary Ann.

'Mr. Pensill's love to Miss Milner, and he'll be proud and delighted, sir.'

It is not known that Salvini was any the less listened to or appreciated by Ben though he had not Pattie to sit with him at the play.

CHAPTER XIV.

A LOVER ENRAGED.

BEN MILNER'S letter was, indeed, a joy to Pattie, as welcome as it was unexpected. It was brought to her private chamber, not laid with the general correspondence on the breakfast table. Perhaps an electric current of sympathy ran between her heart and some heart in the kitchen. She read it at her open window in the summer morning freshness, and believed herself the happiest maid alive, though aggrieved father and mother had presently to be confronted. However, nothing was said at breakfast, and Pattie was suffered to betake herself afterwards to the drawing-room unimpeded. It was there she was supposed to pursue her studies; to read every day a little German, a little French, to practise her music, and sing her songs.

The hours till now had sometimes seemed long with these occupations. They were not long now for she had new dreams to beguile them. And soon she had her mother to talk to. It was easy to see that what Mrs. Gardner was now, Pattie would one day be. They had the same velvet eyes, the same features, the same graceful figure, and buoyant light step. Mrs. Gardner opened one of the venetian blinds to let in more sun. Pattie had chosen to sit in the green shade. It was a pleasant room, spacious but irregular with what Mrs. Gardner called *homes* in the recessed windows and chimney-corners. Her own favourite 'home' had two easy chairs, a turn-table with her work, a book or two and writing materials. Flowering plants were on the window-seat, and her children's miniatures on the walls. This 'home' was sacred. Papa joined mamma there at pleasure, but the young people only by invitation.

Mrs. Gardner invited Pattie to that seclusion now. In one sense Pattie was more timid with her mother than with her father. She had often prevailed with her father by sheer importunity

or transparent guile, but with her mother never, unless by reason and good sense. 'Come, Pattie, and tell me your troubles that you were too tired to talk of last night. We have an hour before us without fear of interruption. Your father has gone into the town to see James Rufforth. We hear that he came down by the night mail.' Mrs. Gardner's voice was tuned like her daughter's—a very agreeable voice in all its modulations.

Pattie brought her letter with her, and came as she was bidden. Her mother's eye fell on the valuable document.

'A letter already, Pattie—from Ben Milner?' she inquired with perceptible tenderness.

Pattie nodded, and both her lips and her eyes laughed. She put her letter out of sight then. All the confession and confidence she meant to make about that, even to her mother, was made by simply showing the envelope. Mrs. Gardner held her peace, and reflected for several minutes before she committed herself to further speech. Pattie could wait, but her eyes grew

pensive as the silence grew oppressive. 'Well, mamma?' said she, at last.

'Well, Pattie, I am perplexed what to say to you,' answered her mother with a sigh. 'It is a hard case for both of you. Your papa will have you show some better reason for throwing James over than you have shown yet. Say that you provoked him, and he swore at you—your papa swore at me once. It was on the evening of our wedding day. I cut my hand rather severely at supper, and he was *so* angry—he was frightened. I promise you, Pattie, I felt subdued—what with the smart and seeing him in such a passion. The knives were old, and worn thin and sharp at the back; and he said I might have seen that, and taken care.'

'Poor women have to undergo terrible things,' Pattie murmured with a face of consternation. 'Perhaps it would be safer not to run the risk of marrying at all? I am glad James swore at me while I am free. You were fast, mamma, and had to bear it. That makes all the difference.'

'It is love makes the difference, Pattie. Your papa has never sworn at me since. I had

your spirit at your years. But it is a sad pity about James.'

'It is his own fault, mamma.'

'He will not regard it in that light. He was too urgent; but your papa was gratified to think you would stay near us, and be settled amongst old friends. Then James is much thought of. He bears a high character for integrity in business, and he has good means. If you could have loved him, it would be very comfortable, Pattie.'

'But I cannot, mamma. I am afraid of him. He has an ungovernable temper.'

'And Ben Milner has a sweet temper—eh, Pattie?'

'I believe so, mamma.'

'He is a loveable person, that I grant. You were always fond of Ben, Pattie, and tyrannized over him more than over anybody, because he would bear it. But that childish fondness does not, as a rule, mature into the love that leads to happy married life.'

'Mamma, we will be exceptions to the rule.'

It was of no use to reason with Pattie when

she answered in this way. Her mother ceased the vain endeavour, and encouraged her to talk of the sights and scenes of London. This she did fluently enough. But it was always and everywhere Ben, Ben. Her heart was full of Ben, and her mouth delighted to speak of him.

Mr. Gardner sought his wife before anybody else when he came back from town. 'Have you seen James Rufforth? What did he say?' was her anxious inquiry, for her husband looked far from satisfied.

'Yes, I have seen him, and he was so insolent that I felt obliged to forbid him coming to Monksburn at present. He declared that he would come, nevertheless. He will not bear his dismissal quietly. I feared that.' Mr. Gardner felt uneasy, and he showed it.

Mrs. Gardner was palpably dismayed. 'If that is the *real* James, Pattie's discernment is not at fault. A violent man is dreadful in a house. She never could be happy with him. She has known nothing but indulgence at home—spoiling and petting, I may almost say.'

Mr. Gardner coincided with his wife, by whose judgment he was guided more often than he knew. 'I made James understand that all idea of a wedding at midsummer must be abandoned. I have no doubt that he will come over as he threatens, and want to see Pattie.'

'And then what is to be done? If we are not at home he will wait. Besides he knows our hours, our walks; it will be almost impossible to circumvent him.'

'He must not see her. He must go as he comes. I will send her away from home again —let her go to aunt Jane.'

'I will write to him, poor fellow. Perhaps he will hear reason from me. I feel very sorry for him.' Of course Mrs. Gardner was sorry for the man whose love for her daughter made him intractable.

'Write if you think it will soothe him, but I doubt it. He was past hearing reason this morning. I never saw a man more mad. The very way to undo himself, if he had been able to reflect.'

'Pattie will never marry him—I wish it could be ended at once.'

'So do I. It is no longer my wish that she should marry him. There is something about James Rufforth more than meets the eye. He must be told the truth, but with management, with caution—I shall try to see him again to-morrow, and will speak as I have opportunity.'

Mrs. Gardner did not ask her husband what that something more than met the eye was which militated in his mind so strongly against James Rufforth. He was not sure himself, and she refrained from speculating. It was enough that she had it in her power to re-assure Pattie with her papa's change of view.

Immediately she did that, Pattie, with an odd twist of feminine perversity, had her turn of compassion for James, and was for granting him the miserable privilege of receiving his dismissal from her own lips—'I might soften it to him, mamma. I never believed he loved me —if he does, more's the pity!' said she, tenderly.

Mrs. Gardner thought that under the circumstances, and his excitable temper con-

sidered, it would be wiser to leave all to her father. 'If James insists upon seeing you, I suppose he must; but for both your sakes it would be better avoided. Then Ben Milner's name need not be mentioned.'

'Has papa answered Ben's letter yet, mamma?' Pattie asked, not without diffidence.

'Don't you think it was sufficiently answered when your papa came to London, travelling on Sunday, to bring you away from Ben's house?' said her mother. This way of putting the question caused Pattie's heart to beat. Mrs. Gardner continued: 'I beg you will not recall Ben to your papa's mind until he has done with James. He is quite troubled enough about James without having Ben to think of; and I may tell you, Pattie, that much as we have all liked Ben as a friend, we had never dreamed of him as a possible lover for you. I am far from clear whether it was honourable behaviour in him to fall in love with you at his own house.'

'Oh, mamma, that was done before! That

happened at Jem's wedding,' Pattie pleaded earnestly.

'Indeed! They say one fool makes more, and love is catching. Poor James Rufforth dates his misfortunes from Jem's wedding. I wonder who besides!'

Mrs. Gardner's voice began to flag, as if her interest in the subject were for the moment spent. Pattie took the hint, and as no formal veto had been promulgated, she wrote to Ben a short letter, which he found as sweet as short. To Miss Phœbe she wrote more at length; an Mrs. Gardner also wrote to her with thanks for kindness and hospitality to her dear little Pattie, and hopes that they might meet before the summer was over—hopes and thanks on which Miss Phœbe put the most favourable interpretation for her brother Ben.

The whole of that week passed over peaceably. Twice Mr. Gardner came back from town reporting that he had tried to see James Rufforth and had failed. He had gone to Leeds one day, another he had gone to Man-

chester. A sense of security began to settle down upon Pattie and her mother: they sat together in that cosy 'home,' and talked happy hours of trivialities away, winning deeper and deeper into each other's confidence. Pattie learnt to rest at ease in the assurance that deliverance from James accomplished, Ben would not be long an exile from Monksburn. Her fancy played much oftener about his coming than about James's going, and a letter from him every morning, sure as the sunrise, did not let her fancy grow dull for want of refreshment.

But one noonday she was alone in the drawing-room, her mother being busy in some domestic matter elsewhere, when she heard a step on the gravel under the windows —James Rufforth's step, as the sudden hard throb of her pulses bore witness. At heart Pattie was strong. She had ready wit and ready courage. Some instinct warned her that the worst thing she could do would be to manifest a fear of the man; and she put a control upon herself, pulled herself together, braced

herself up. He halted, seemed to hesitate and listen; then he looked in at a window, distant from her mother's 'home' where she was ensconced. He knocked on the glass. Pattie had never known him take that liberty before, and she let him knock unnoticed. After waiting a minute, he came along the path, and discovered her where she was. The old-fashioned windows opened in leaves, like lattices, and Pattie rose, her work in her hand, blushing in her own despite, and looking not unkind.

'I want a few words with you, Pattie—may I come in?' he said humbly enough.

'Yes, James. Go round by the greenhouse door,' she answered. And in a minute or so he entered the room.

He wheeled up for himself a chair near to hers, and sank heavily into it, dropping his hat upon the floor. He was dusty and tired, and said that he had walked all the way from town. His usually florid colour was much lowered, and his eyes were vague and dim. He held out his hand to Pattie, but without looking at her, and she gave him hers. For a minute or

more he did not speak. Pattie's tender heart began to ache. He appeared so ill, jaded, dejected—there actually came tears into her eyes. He saw them, and then he opened his mouth:

'I am sorry I was rude to you on Sunday, Pattie; the devil possessed me, I think; and you were frightened—so your father tells me. And we are not to be married at midsummer?'

'No, James; it cannot be. I am sorry too —if you loved me,' Pattie stammered.

'If I loved you! You will not forgive me then? There's no place of repentance left me, Pattie?'

Pattie did not answer except by a gentle shake and turning away of her head.

'Well, little girl, there's no compulsion. Come to me willingly, or not at all,' said he, and with that he tossed her hand away.

The tears rolled down Pattie's cheeks now, and the pity that is akin to love moved her deeply. They were both silent for some time. Pattie recovered herself first, wondering

whether her mother knew that James was there, and wishing she would come. Mrs. Gardner did not know; she was in the linen-room, like a good housewife, turning over her stores old and new.

Suddenly James asked if Pattie had been out, and when she replied, only in the garden, to gather flowers for the table, he said, 'Will you take a walk with me down by the burn now?'

Nothing like fear undefined for developing female craft. Pattie, with a simple coolness that surprised her to reflect upon afterwards, answered, remonstrating: 'I think you have walked enough for this morning, James. Wait till after luncheon.' And she looked up at him observantly.

His eyes slid away from hers, and he said, as if satisfied, 'Very well. It shall be for after luncheon, then,' and the moment her notice was withdrawn he gave her a quick suspicious glance. She was conscious of it, and something both in his words and in his manner put her still more upon her guard, and made her

wish they had other company besides themselves.

'Mamma is not far off; I'll call her,' said she, with a movement to rise and go.

'Stay where you are! I did not come to see mamma, but you,' said James, harshly, and gave her a nod that was half a menace.

Pattie sat down again, and had the nerve to seem indifferent; she even took up her lace-work and sewed. He watched her for a minute or two, his mouth trembling into an angry sneer; then he snatched the flimsy stuff out of her fingers, rolled it into a ball, and flung it to the furthest end of the room. Pattie folded her hands in her lap, and directed her gaze towards the garden.

'You may surely give me one little quarter of an hour, when you are sending me away for all my life,' cried he, with a touch of savageness intended, perhaps, to daunt her.

But Pattie turned upon him with great spirit: 'You don't love me like that, James, and you know you don't. Go and talk to

Molly Clay. You have loved her longer than I can remember.'

James stared, as well he might. 'Molly is worth ten of you!' was his rejoinder, very insolently spoken.

'So she is, to you. She is indispensable to you. You carry everything to her.'

'Oh, that's the secret of it! You're jealous, Pattie,' said James, with sly triumph. And he chuckled audibly.

Pattie flushed with scornful indignation, and rose from her chair to pass by him. He put a foot in her way. 'Let me go to mamma,' said she. Then James took hold of her by one arm, and produced from the breast-pocket of his coat a pistol, and pointed it at her.

'Do you see that?' said he, between his teeth. Pattie neither stirred nor winked.

'Yes, James. I am not afraid of fire-arms. She looked at it, and at him, and offered her other hand to take it.

He let her take it, grinning, half-amused, half-mischievous, saying, 'It is loaded, and filed to a hair.'

The lattice was still open, and, quick as thought, Pattie threw it out. It fell on the gravel, exploding as it fell. Then James exploded too. Pattie felt hot all over; but as for mental fear she had lost that at the first glimpse of peri.. She sat down again in her place, neither angry nor contemptuous any longer, and waited until his fury sank into a muttering, cowed sullenness. She never took her eyes off him once; and except that her voice was low, as if she desired not to be overheard, there was no hesitation in her manner of inquiring whether he had any more deadly weapons about him. He said that he had not.

'Then go and find my lace-work—it is behind the screen. And come back and let me talk to you.' He went and came with unwillingness, but he did go and come. Sitting down again he rested his arms upon his knees, and clasped his hands together, and bowed down his head that Pattie could not see his face. His aspect of humiliation hurt her. It was long before she spoke. She had to bite her lip, and struggle against a swell in her throat, but her

heart and will were firmly fixed to say what she wanted to say, which was this:

'James, I once saw you fly into an awful rage with your favourite setter because she did not come out of the stubble when you called her, and after beating her cruelly, you snatched your gun, and shot her dead. I remember it all, as if it were yesterday—and Dr. Williams, taking you by the shoulders, and saying, "I tell you what, young man, you'll end your days in a madhouse if you give way to the devil like that." Everybody was terrified of you. Your mother cried, so did I, for the poor beast.' Pattie had to stop for crying now, but despite her sobs she had her say out. 'You are giving way to the devil now; so you did on Sunday; but you know what you are doing as well as I know—and as for being the heroine of a lovers' tragedy, I have no ambition at all, James, so don't make yourself ridiculous. Molly Clay can guide you with a thread, and, if you are sensible, you will go back to her as you always do after a change, and leave me alone. And

by-and-by we can be friends again—I hear mamma coming.'

James Rufforth started erect as Mrs. Gardner entered: 'Oh, James, how do you do? I did not know that you were here,' she began to say, and then turning to Pattie, 'Did you tell Moss to let the little birds be? what matter if they do steal the cherries?' She had heard the shot, and had ascribed it to the gardener warring against the blackbirds and thrushes. Neither Pattie nor James enlightened her. She saw James's gloom, and the traces of Pattie's tears, and supposed they had had their quarrel out. She hoped there was an end of it; and as Pattie vanished to bathe her face, she invited James to come to luncheon. He refused at first, but, on slight persuasion, he followed her to the dining-room.

Pattie presented herself at table in a matter-of-fact way, and gave James to eat and to drink as if there had been nothing amiss. He drank copiously of iced water, but ate scarcely at all. When the meal was over, Pattie told her mother that she was going to put on her hat,

and walk to the gate with James. Her mother bade her not go further than the gate.

Pattie led the way by the garden-door, which caused them to pass along the gravel-walk below the drawing-room windows. Nobody else had been there, and the pistol lay where it had fallen. James picked it up, and Pattie said, 'Give me that thing to keep.' But he put it into his pocket again, turning his head aside as if ashamed.

When they reached the gate, he asked, 'Shall you tell your father and mother, Pattie? I did not intend to hurt you.'

'I will not tell them, on one condition. Promise before I speak; I know you will keep your word,' she said.

'Very well. I promise.'

'Go to old Dr. Williams, and tell him, he will help you to keep right, if you try; and—and—pray to God, James. It is of no use to make other people miserable. Had you hurt me you would deserve to die for it. You are your own master if you choose to be. That is what I think.'

James Rufforth did not say good-bye to her, or offer his hand, but went away with the slink of a hound that has been chastised severely and unexpectedly. His last look at Pattie gave her to understand that he bore her no love now. But she turned back to the house feeling inexpressibly sorry for him.

Mrs. Gardner met her daughter, and would have brought her into the drawing-room to tell the story of her interview with James, but Pattie pleaded that there was nothing worth telling. 'He was very cross and disagreeable, mamma, that of course; but I do not expect him to tease me any more. It would be a good thing if he married Molly Clay, and had done with his passions and caprices.'

'You may say that to me, Pattie, but do not say it to anybody else. Poor Molly might not like it.'

'I think, mamma, I shall go upstairs, and rest till tea. Vexation of spirit is more tiring than walking ten miles.'

'My love, you shall. I can imagine that James was odious.'

Pattie's mother took care of her, darkened her room, and made her lie down, for Pattie could not keep from crying. When she was left quite alone she remembered the loving Almighty Father who is over all, and would have done as she counselled James to do; but the aspiration was enough; she fell asleep upon it, and awoke greatly encouraged, strengthened, and comforted.

CHAPTER XV.

BEN IS DISALLOWED.

THERE was no nobleness, no generosity in James Rufforth's disposition. He was very proud, revengeful, and conceited. He was apt to give a loose to his violent temper where he safely could, but he had a wholesome fear of consequences, and had never yet lost himself so far as to strike where he might be struck again. His father told Pattie's father that self-same day how James, as a boy, could not behave himself well long together except under terror of the rod; and what he had been as a boy he was still, in a different degree, as a man. His mother, even in extenuating his faults, revealed how great they were. She assured Mrs. Gardner that her son had never raised his hand against her. And as for swearing, it was a bad habit

that he had learnt in the stables when he was young, but she hoped that he had almost broken himself of it. It was not to the purpose to urge, that on the Exchange, in his office, in general society, James was acceptable, and, perhaps, popular ; a man lives with his wife at home, and if he be rough and overbearing there, it is small consolation to know that he has to knock under to his equals abroad.

Pattie Gardner's engagement to James Rufforth was broken off, and her friends made no mystery why.

'An ill-conditioned fellow, and she is well rid of him,' was Dr. Williams's opinion expressed to her mother.

He found an opportunity of a few words with Pattie herself before many days were over, and let her know that her dismissed lover had made the confession that she had ordered him to make. He did not dwell on what had been the occasion of it. He probably discerned that Pattie was more nervous in the remembrance than she had been in the acting. The Doctor felt it his duty, however, to take her father and

mother into the confidence that had been given to himself. He said that Pattie's nerve had pulled her through a danger greater than she knew. James had deliberately furnished himself with the means of killing, and had thus laid himself open to any devilish impulse of the moment, arising from pride, malice or vindictiveness. Her intrepid spirit gave him pause. A panic—a cry for pity, would just as likely have stimulated his coward-strength to prove itself upon her by a cruel revenge.

Mrs. Gardner shuddered, and covered her face. Her dear, innocent Pattie in such peril! 'And if you will believe me, Dr. Williams, she said no worse of James Rufforth than that he had been cross and disagreeable.'

Mr. Gardner wanted to know whether there was risk for Pattie in James's neighbourhood. The Doctor hoped not; but said, of course she would keep out of his way: his pride was humiliated and his passion baulked, and he was in a very vile humour.

'But he is no more mad than you are,' he added. 'If he does go off the balance it will be

from giving way to his temper. Some of my brethren would say that it amounts to disease already. But he discriminates his actions yet, as clearly as the coolest of us.'

Pattie's liberty was, however, restricted. If her mother lost sight of her for more than ten minutes she was uneasy, and went in search of her. When Pattie strolled into the garden, her mother watched that she was not decoyed beyond it. Fear increased, and precautions were doubled. Soon Pattie might not stir alone. This was bondage to her free and active disposition. The boys were at school, and came home from Saturday till Monday only once a month—a limited period of protection for her in wood-walks and rambles by the burn. She began to complain of her prison rules; and in a letter to Ben Milner she, at length, revealed her pitiful sad case.

Ben would have been no true knight had he not run to her rescue. The last train one Friday night brought him to Burford, and he came to Monksburn, knocking at her father's door like an invited guest. And they were so astonished

that they took him in as one. He said he could stay until Monday evening. Nobody had asked him.

Pattie would have liked to sit up late, but her father said: 'Go to bed, Pattie;' and when she had kissed him and gone, with a rueful, happy glance at Ben, laughing after her, they two had a talk over her trials; and all her courage in difficulty, and submission in bonds, was told to her true lover.

'Phibs will say the fellow ought to be tied up by the thumbs and whipped,' quoth Ben, in his wrath.

'Worse than whipping will happen to him, if he does not mind what he is about. My opinion is, that he ought to be under restraint. His temper is frightful; he is in a chronic fury. He will not bear being spoken to.' Mr. Gardner kept himself informed of James Rufforth's doings and behaviour, and knew that there was just now great trouble about him in his father's house. 'It is not that he loves Pattie to such distraction, as that he is bitter at being thwarted by her—I am told that he rails incessantly

against her, and is not sparing of threats. Williams advises us to send her from home. But James would follow her. I prefer to put a bold face on it: we could not stay away with her long, either her mother or I, and her mother will not suffer her out of her sight.'

'*I*'ll take charge of her, if you'll allow me, Mr. Gardner,' said Ben, with the air of making a simple proposal for the convenience of a friend.

'You are very kind, Ben, but I do not want your intervention,' was Mr. Gardner's dry rejoinder.

However, when he mentioned the audacious expedient to his wife, she was not for scouting it peremptorily, or altogether: 'That is what it will have to come to, I expect. And it would take her quite out of James's way,' she said.

'I shall not think of it,' said Mr. Gardner, and closed the subject.

But as Ben Milner had come to Monksburn, he was not inhospitably prevented being as comfortable as the place and circumstances would allow. Pattie's Sunday morning face was

bright as the day. The earliest glimpse her father had of her was through the interstices of his dressing-room blind, walking with Ben in the garden. He called to his wife to look out too.

'Yes, my dear, I see them. Poor things! let them be happy,' was the serene conjugal reply. Mrs. Gardner had begun to regard Ben as Pattie's way of peace and safety out of all her troubles. Pattie married, then James would be vanquished; then, perhaps, he would marry Molly Clay; and everybody would live quietly ever afterwards.

The lovers were pacing the long walk which lay in shadow, and the dew was on the flowers still—such wealth of old fashioned flowers, fragrance as well as beauty, crowded in the broad border under the wall, covered with trained fruit-trees. Rear ranks of tall white and orange lilies, bushes of forgotten roses, moss roses loveliest in bud, cabbage roses, roses of Provence, of York and Lancaster, all the hardy old growths that are now so rare, mixed with rosemary and lavender, ladslove and balm; and front ranks of double stocks, red, white, purple, and wall-flowers, ruby and gold. Ben Milner

was very fond of this old walk, which had been a walk for nearly three hundred years. The house and garden were at rest with the restful stillness of Sunday, and summer was in its glory. Pattie in her white dress amongst the flowers seemed its crowning joy.

Ben was teasing, as usual. No sighing, sentimental swain was he ever. In the hey-day of youth and passion, when he courted his lost Mary, he had rhymed to her eyes, to her lips, to her every feature in anacreontic vein, but he had not put his tears in any bottle when they parted. He had let them water the earth, and thence was springing an after-growth of love that fulfilled his heart's desire. Pattie was so gentle, bright, tender: Pattie had such faith, courage, constancy; he worshipped her virtues, but he matched the tint of a half-blown blush rose against her cheek, and loved her for her sweet beauty too. Which foolish form of adoration Pattie liked as well to-day as wiser approval.

James Rufforth had not wooed her at all—had added no mystery of happiness to her

opening life. He had bargained for her, and was impatient to get his purchase into his possession, but not one faintest spark of love had he been able to kindle in her heart or imagination. Perhaps there was an awakening of curiosity, no more. Then Ben Milner came, sacred fire in his soul, and its breath on his lips. '*Love me!*' whispered Ben, and Pattie knew, all in a moment, that she loved him. She would have gone after him now all round the world. She had her coy little airs and tender timidities; she was afraid where she had never feared before, and shy where she had been innocently bold. All her taming was not done ready to Ben's hand. The revelation of love came to her by measure, and it was his delight to lead her on gently until alarm should be lost in perfect trust and passionate devotion. It was still a wonder to Pattie how beautiful her happiness was, and how lovely their love. She told Ben, with a dreamy face, that she did not yet half understand it. Ben said that he should be very pleased to teach her more, but he believed the lesson was never all learnt on this side heaven.

Mr. Gardner had not an austere manner by nature, but he chose to be austere this morning. His wife tried to make up for it by confidential cordiality to Ben, and a warm kiss of encouragement to Pattie. It was surely not necessary to afflict Pattie any more, poor darling!

'Mamma, I wish I might begin to go to the school again. My class will fall to pieces if I neglect it much longer,' she said, when breakfast was about half over.

'You are not to stir a step beyond the garden, Pattie. Your class has been given to somebody else by this time,' was Mr. Gardner's peremptory answer to her appeal.

Pattie reddened at the sharp address. It was so rare a thing that she should be snubbed or scolded that it made her feel ashamed. She looked at Ben shyly. Her father intercepted his responsive glance, and felt provoked.

'I do not suppose that James Rufforth ranges the country with swords and guns on Sunday. Don't you think she might go, papa?' urged her mother.

'James is more likely to be ranging the

country on Sunday than on Monday: on Monday he has business to attend to. If Pattie is not satisfied with the bounds set her at home, she can go to her Aunt Jane. Indeed, I have been thinking that her Aunt Jane's house would be the best place for her at the present time.' Mr. Gardner had not thought so twelve hours ago; but he was perverse to-day. The most amiable of men, he still disliked being defied, and set at nought in his own garden; and Pattie's walk with Ben in the dewy fore-breakfast hour he regarded as a most daring defiance.

Aunt Jane lived in an out-of-the-way village as any in the Riding, and from her youth upwards had been a bugbear to Pattie. She was a terrible, old-fashioned disciplinarian, and her house had ever been threatened as a sort of putting in the corner of her when she was a little naughty girl.

'She would not whip me, and lock me in the dark closet now, for other people's fault, would she, papa?' said she, with a proud flash of tears in her velvet eyes.

'For other people's fault.' Mr. Gardner had a right to endure compunction. Once that dear little soft round Pattie had suffered punishment for what somebody else had done. She had come smarting and sobbing to Ben to tell him all about it, and he had seen that justice was done her. Suddenly, close upon the gust of impetuous reproach to her father, followed full recollection of all the tragical circumstances and their comic element combined, and torrents of confusion dyed Pattie's face, her neck—all that was visible of her. She blushed and tingled to her toes with the certainty that Ben would be remembering too.

'Never mind, love,' said her mother softly, very sorry for her.

But Pattie could not bear it. She could not look up. She went out of the room, vexed with everybody, but most with herself. Mrs. Gardner's deprecating air was all Ben needed—he went after Pattie, and caught her by the greenhouse door. She was rosier than the reddest flower there. Ben found it impossible

to be pathetic. He drew her lovely little averted face to his breast, petted her, stroked her hair, her burning cheek, laughed at her, and whispered, 'Is it worse than it was then, Pattie? I enjoy this—it is like old times.' He did not prevail with her to meet his eyes, but he did succeed in making her laugh. And when a girl has laughed at being put to the blush before her lover, she cannot go back to crying over it.

While Pattie was comforted outside the room, Mr. Gardner was justly rebuked within. 'She has behaved like a heroine, papa, and you are treating her as if she were a baby. I wonder how you can,' said her mother.

Mr. Gardner was too secure in his position to enter upon any self-defence. He knew he was right. 'Ben Milner wants to marry Pattie. Can he afford to keep her? that is the question. I am sure that he cannot. I am not going to hand Pattie over to the miseries of a poor marriage; nor will I allow her to enter into an engagement without a marriage in prospect. She is a mere child to Ben, and I don't want

him for a son-in-law. Let there be an end of this foolishness, or she goes to Aunt Jane.'

Mrs. Gardner sighed, held her peace, and thought of many things—and chief of this hindrance of fortune.

The whole family went to church in the morning, then dined, separated—dozed, perhaps. Late in the afternoon they strolled into the hay-field by the house, where the grass was cut and spread to dry in the sun. Ben paid for his morning's fun by continued reserve on Pattie's part. Her mother bade her keep under her wing, and her father was quite her father again in kindness to her. The lovers both knew what that signified. Pattie was too docile to escape by stratagem, and her father took her hand through his arm, and made her walk with him. Ben might walk too if he liked, but it was not the same thing.

In the evening they went to church again, and in returning Mrs. Gardner required her husband's arm herself. Ben and Pattie then naturally followed behind, and did not hasten. He told her that her father had decreed their

separation and a silence between them—that he would listen to no remonstrance, no argument or entreaty.

Pattie was quite pale and drooping all at once. 'Will you not write to me, Ben?' said she.

Ben meant to write to her, as usual, and he had not accepted her father's dismissal. 'He says I am too poor, and he does not see any prospect of my getting richer—but what does Pattie say?' he asked anxiously.

'Rich or poor, Ben, I love you.'

They were in the garden now. The parents went into the house. 'It is sad enough to say good good-bye, without having it cut short,' Mrs. Gardner said to her too rational master, and guided him indoors.

He did not half like such handling. He looked out of the window. 'When there is to be an end let there be a quick end. There she stands, twiddling a button of his coat.'

Mrs. Gardner was very indignant. 'I should be ashamed to watch them, if I were you,' said she. 'You have done what you call your

duty to both of them—and a painful duty it must have been, unless your heart is very much changed.'

'I have not said that I relished it, have I?' asked Mr. Gardner, greatly injured.

'It is impossible that you should; and I am surprised you did not take longer thought before performing such a penance.'

'And in the meanwhile Pattie learns to twiddle Ben's buttons!' Mr. Gardner was sarcastic to the wife of his bosom.

The lovers had moved out of sight now. When they were called for, and came, it was too evident that Pattie had been crying. 'Mamma says I am not old enough to set my will against papa's will, and I must be good. But I am very unhappy.' These words dwelt in Ben's ears long after they were spoken. And all vows and promises notwithstanding, there was a weight upon their jocund spirits when they parted next day.

Ben, who knew the common course of true love and the world, was confident of a favourable conclusion. He went back to London too,

to work, and friends, and a general welcome; but Pattie stayed at home in restricted liberty, and in fear of worse. Her mother was very good to her. Her father was very firm.

CHAPTER XVI.

PATTIE IS SENT INTO EXILE.

BEN'S first letter Pattie had. His next she missed, and others after that. A post-bag had been instituted, and master kept the key in his own pocket, and never let the bag out of his own hands till he had seen what was in it. Thus far cook. Pattie did not suspect foul play until she had felt repeated disappointments. At length she inquired of her mother—

'Mamma dear, has papa kept back any letters from Ben?'

'Yes, Pattie, he has. I begged him to let you have them, but he thought that the shortest way to stop your correspondence.'

When Mr. Gardner came from town, and would have been kind and caressing to his

precious little daughter, she looked at him with transparent candour, and said : 'Papa, I want my letters from Ben—'

'Then you may want, Pattie; for I shall not give them to you,' was his curt answer, and he walked away, and left her.

Pattie let Miss Phœbe know her durance, and the fast passing summer days were cheered by missives from her. There was another young man beginning to hang about Monksburn just then, whom Mr. Gardner received with civility enough. He was a lanky, pale young man with a great nose, a sloping forehead, and a retreating chin. He had a good property in the neighbourhood, and was a bachelor. James Rufforth, who had heard no breath of Ben Milner as a rival, got wind of this gentleman in very brief time. While Pattie was fretting for Ben's letters, James was picturing her with this aquiline suitor, whom only to hear of was to hate. Mr. Langworthy did actually propose for Pattie to her father, and got his permission to try his fate further, if he had the pluck.

Pattie was utterly disobliging, and was overheard musing to herself: 'If I must marry, I will not marry a fool.'

The gentleman did not, however, take his rejection for final; and was emboldened to persevere by the countenance he had from Mr. Gardner. If there had been no James Rufforth in the way he might have given her a good deal of trouble, but James took her cause into his own hands, waylaid Langworthy one evening on his road home from Monksburn, and promised that he would wring his neck for him if ever he knew him to go there again.

Mr. Langworthy was not the stuff heroes are made of. He had a likeness to domestic poultry that made James Rufforth's threat absurdly appropriate. Pattie laughed till she cried, when his adventure was told her. But no one else laughed.

'You will have to be labelled "dangerous," Pattie,' a friend told her.

But her father said: 'I will have no more nonsense or delay. Pack her up, mamma. She goes to aunt Jane for all the winter!'

Mrs. Gardner's dismay was beyond words. She stood and gazed at her husband with dumb reproach. 'I mean what I say. That lumbering idiot will do somebody a mischief for the mere pride and spite of the thing.' Mr. Gardner was really alarmed, distressed. People had spoken to him, he said, of the risk, and advised him to send his daughter away for a few months, as there was no lawful means of locking up James Rufforth.

It was left to her mother to communicate her sentence of banishment to Pattie. She heard it in silence, but her soft mouth quivered, and she broke out crying when her father kissed her at good-night. Aunt Jane was written to, and would be able to receive Pattie whenever it was convenient to send her over. A post-chaise was ordered for the very next day. That night her mother went to Pattie's room with her, and was reasonable though tender; for her grief was quite childish. She cried passionately, and said it was 'Cruel, cruel!' and she did not think papa could have been so unkind—'As if I had done something

wrong,' she urged pitifully. Her mother was at her wits' end how to comfort her. Her father was walking about the house as uneasy as an affectionate and deeply perplexed father would be. It was of no use to offer Pattie gifts or promises of future visits pleasanter than to Aunt Jane. Her mother hushed her in her arms like a baby, and entreated her to be still, or to say what she wanted. 'If I might have Ben's letters,' she whispered, sobbing.

Mrs. Gardner went to find her husband. 'Give the poor darling her letters, papa. It is of no use beating the air. You might as well make a merit of necessity,' was her plea. 'She will fret herself ill if you send her away without them. I am sure, for my part, I should be thankful to let Ben take her, and make the best of small fortunes!'

Mrs. Gardner was wearied to the heart. Mr. Gardner was vanquished, and went for the letters. Her mother brought them to Pattie.

'You are a wheedling thing, Pattie,' said

her father's voice at the door. And then he retired to his deserved rest.

The seals of the letters were unbroken. What a good, trustworthy, honourable, incurious, dear papa!

'I must read them, mamma,' Pattie urged, when she had lavished these adjectives on their preserver.

'It will do very well if you sleep with them, as you used to sleep with your old dolly. Listen—that is eleven o'clock. There is half a volume of reading in those four envelopes.' Pattie kissed the beloved handwriting. 'You are a goose, Pattie!'

'Were you never a goose, mamma?'

'Most of us are in our time, more or less. —Now sleep, child, sleep.' And out went the light. Her mother felt for her, and kissed her in the dark, and the letters had to wait until the morning to tell their tale.

Pattie had gained a substantial triumph, but she was very sorrowful at breakfast. So were other people. It was like pulling down the blinds and shutting the sun out of the house to

send her away. She had done with crying, however, since she had got Ben's letters. She put on a robust heather-coloured costume fit for the moors, bleak even in September. Aunt Jane lived on the edge of a moorland region, in a four-square, little stone house, where elegancies of dress were quite out of place. Therefore Pattie was not encumbered with finery.

Mr. Gardner went to town at his usual hour. Mrs. Gardner stayed at home. No attention was to be drawn to Pattie's departure, nor to the place of her seclusion. She was conveyed quietly away in a hired chaise, with her nurse—a very dragon of devotion—for her escort. Nurse had friends in the village where Aunt Jane lived, and she was to lodge with them, meanwhile, as a comfort and protection to Pattie. This was a happy suggestion of Pattie's own, almost at the last hour.

'I believe you are afraid of the rod and the dark closet still,' said her mother, who was dressing her to go.

'I shall feel much safer with dear old Bluff within call,' Pattie confessed.

Pattie had not been told how long her exile was to endure. She begged to know; but her mother could only say that it must depend on circumstances. She promised her a letter from Monksburn every week; and Ben's letters were not to be denied her any more.

It was a drive of fifteen miles to Aunt Jane's house. Over hill and over dale, until cultivated fields were scarce, and the moors rose and fell in broad dusky waves to the horizon. Topcliffe township was scattered along a noisy little river. At the entrance was the bridge, a fine old stone bridge of three arches. The church and vicarage house were close by it, and the churchyard stretched up behind them, very ancient and crowded. The village was one long street. Aunt Jane's house was at the furthest and highest extremity, with a garden round it, rescued from the waste beyond.

The sun was shining upon the front, on the closed doors and narrow windows, as the poor young traveller came in sight of it. 'Oh, Bluff dear, it looks more dismal than a real

prison!' cried she, in melancholy consternation.

'You see, joy, in this country they build the walls thick and the windows small because of the winters, which is awful rough and long,' nurse said, deprecating the complaint she could not remedy.

Pattie sighed, and leant forward as the chaise stopped at the garden gate. She got out, and walked up the straight path to the door and knocked. A strong, even foot came along the passage, the door was opened, and there Aunt Jane stood—the same Aunt Jane as ever, tall as a grenadier and almost as erect.

Pattie was too much agitated to notice the details of her reception. She came to her senses in the bed-room she was to inhabit. The chaise was gone, Bluff was gone, her box stood in front of the chimney, and Aunt Jane sat in a rush-bottomed chair at the foot of the bed.

Aunt Jane was Mr. Gardner's aunt. She had been married and widowed a very long

while ago. She was past seventy now, but robust as in middle age. No warning of mortality had been brought her yet. Her black eyes were like a hawk's for keenness, and her hearing was as quick. She had been handsome in her youth, and was handsome still; but there was a frowning fierceness about her, very alarming to some people. Pattie quaked as she took off her hat and gloves, and felt quite nervous, though her courage was of fine quality, and great on occasion.

'You want no dressing,' said Aunt Jane, and rose to conduct her downstairs.

A minute carried you all over the house. On either side of the passage, a parlour; behind the parlour a kitchen, scullery, larder; and four chambers over, none of them more than twelve feet square. The dark closet was on the landing at the top of the stairs. Pattie felt like six years old again as she passed it.

Pattie did not know how much of her private affairs had been communicated to Aunt Jane—in fact, nothing had been told her beyond the unromantic truth, that it was desirable to

send her out of the way of a man who would not acquiesce in her refusal to marry him—a man called James Rufforth. Ben Milner's name had not been mentioned: Pattie was not likely to be confidential with her duenna about either; nor was Aunt Jane a woman to seek sentimental communications. She could sit dumb the day through. It was the habit of her life. And her one servant was like her. Martha and she were contemporaries.

Pattie had a straw bee-hive chair given to her by the window in the parlour, with these words: 'That is your place, Pattie.' And she knew that she would be expected to occupy that chair and that particular spot throughout her visit.

The window looked south-west upon an open expanse of moor, and except the sheep, no living thing ever came in view of it.

'Have you brought any work with you?' was the first question asked of her.

'I have brought my materials for sketching. Mamma said I could sew for you, if you have any needlework that wants doing.'

'Plenty.' And forthwith a complicated garment of unbleached calico was given her to exercise her industry upon. She did not like the smell of unbleached calico, but anything to do was better than nothing, and her hands before her.

Before Pattie had been a day in the house she felt as if she had been there a week. When she had been a week, she felt as if she had been a year. For austere silence it was worse than a nunnery—more like a church vault. Her courage rallied, and she kept complaints out of her letters. Aunt Jane asked what she found to write about. Pattie was descriptive, and more. She made little water-colour headings to her letters home, and she favoured Ben Milner with enigmatical illustrations to decipher. On the plea of sketching, she contrived herself much out-door liberty. Every morning Bluff came for her, and they went upon the moor. It was fine, hot weather, and the wilderness blossomed with beauty. Aunt Jane was probably as much relieved by Pattie's absences as Pattie was herself. By-

and-bye, not the mornings only but the evenings until dusk, came to be spent abroad, and a folio full of sky effects, of bits of stone, moss, water, testified to Pattie's diligence in art. Bluff also had her portrait taken in a variety of ways, and a cow that pastured on the edge of the moor was made very useful as a study from nature. Pattie did not scruple to tether her, if need were.

There were no books in Aunt Jane's house for a girl to read; Aunt Jane never opened a book, nor looked into a newspaper. She considered herself a practical, hard-working, pattern woman. She went to church twice on Sunday; she made clothes for the poor; she lived on flint-broth herself, the neighbours said, but she would give gruel to such as needed and had it not. Her habits were penurious in the last degree, of which Mr. Gardner was not aware. Pattie supposed she had come to be like that by living so much alone. She pitied her; but Aunt Jane was conscious of no want. There is perhaps no greater waste in the world than of

pity for persons who are entirely satisfied with their condition.

Aunt Jane had one pleasure that made up for the lack of all others, the pleasure of saving money. I suppose that nobody who has not tried what that means can understand the deep, stealthy joys of accumulation. Martha's sympathies were with her mistress, and she lent her her aid.

'All the solid savings of the country are made in the Three per Cents,' was the first positive observation that Aunt Jane originated in Pattie's presence, and that seemed addressed to herself rather than to her young companion.

Pattie's information concerning investments was limited, but she looked interested, in hopes of a little talk. She suffered so much from continuous suppression of speech that no opportunity was too small for her expectations. Aunt Jane sat at the table, a tin box in front of her, and on her right hand a slate, upon which she was copying figures from bits of spotted or diapered paper. Pattie usefully remarked that she believed the national debt

began in the reign of King William III., and that it had grown to enormous dimensions during the war at the beginning of the century.

Aunt Jane said, 'Hum'm!' and was not diverted from her numerals.

Pattie lapsed into silence again. 'I think you are a good girl, Pattie,' was Aunt Jane's next utterance. The tin box was re-locked then, and the sum upon the slate was done. Pattie was pleased, naturally. 'Yes, I have reason to think you are a good girl. I notice more than you might suppose. You have never been out of humour since into this house you came three weeks ago. You will be quite wasted and thrown away, unless you get a bad husband.'

'Then I trust my guardian angel will let me be wasted and thrown away,' Pattie devoutly answered.

'What have you against this man, this James Rufforth, who will not take "No?"'

'Only that I don't like him, Aunt Jane.'

'A sound reason, Pattie. If you marry to please me, I shall give you five thousand pounds

in your pocket on your wedding-day. It is all there—in the Three per Cents.' Aunt Jane tapped the tin box, and nodded to emphasize her announcement.

Pattie's velvet eyes looked brightly up, and she smiled, but said, without hesitation, 'Then I had better tell you at once, Aunt Jane, that five thousand times five thousand will not bribe me to marry to please anybody but myself and one other person.'

Aunt Jane snatched up Pattie's fortune, and on the instant conveyed it out of sight. Pattie was so wicked as to laugh at its summary disappearance; but the mere mention of Aunt Jane's conditional benevolent intentions had loosed the warm young heart towards her. And, when she returned from her expedition upstairs with the tin box, Pattie ventured upon an interrogative: 'Have you anybody in your eye for me, Aunt Jane?'

'Have you anybody in *your* eye, Pattie? —that is more to the purpose,' was the blunt rejoinder.

Pattie blushed and said nothing, with a

pretty prim demureness of face, which Aunt Jane interpreted into a confession.

'Speak out! What is he like? Is he friends with your people at home?' urged she, in a tone of impatience and interest.

'Good friends. Mamma is *so* fond of him. Papa likes him very well too, but he would like him more if he had more money. So you see, Aunt Jane, five thousand pounds in my pocket on my wedding-day would be very nice.'

'Very nice, indeed! You are a coaxing little cat. You have not told me what he is like.'

'He is beautiful to me!—I am not making fun, Aunt Jane. He is very manly, and he is beautiful in the face. He has such a *good* countenance—and he *is* good.' Pattie became earnest, for her hearer was allowing a little expression of doubt and scorn to penetrate her grimness.

'What is he? what does he do for his living? what profession does he follow?' she asked further.

'He is a clerk. But there are clerks—and clerks, you know, Aunt Jane. Charles Lamb

who brought to light the discovery of roast pig in China, was à clerk. He wrote such amusing essays. So does Ben—'

'What are you chattering about? Charles Lamb?—your tongue wags like a lamb's tail, once set it a-going. Roast pig?—if your young man is poor, let me tell you that roast pig will be a rare dish with you. Do you mean that he loves roast pig?'

'No, Aunt Jane.' Pattie was laughing, yet confounded too.

Aunt Jane had learnt as much as she cared to know at present; and Martha came in to family prayers.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUT ON THE MOOR.

'PHIBS, if you know any lawful cause or impediment why your loving brother should not set out for a tour in Yorkshire to-morrow morning, will you be so obliging as to mention it?'

'I know of none, Ben. It would do you good.'

'Then, ma'am, after breakfast, I shall take my knapsack, and the express train to the north, and hey for Topcliffe!'

'You are not afraid that ogress will eat you?'

'No, ma'am. She has not yet eaten Pattie, who would be much tenderer and sweeter in the flesh.'

'Will you take your dress suit, Ben?'

'Yes, Phibs. I want to see Pattie in her white bodice again. *You* do not see what that has to do with it. I have a mysterious intimation that somebody in Yorkshire will ask me to dinner, and that Pattie will be there.'

'I wish your mysterious intimation may come true. Mind one thing, Ben—keep clear of that dreadful Mr. James Rufforth. I should be very uneasy if I thought you would let him find you out.'

'James Rufforth has such a kindly, comfortable contempt for me in my clerkship and *bric-à-brac* shop, as he disrespectfully calls this commodious mansion, that he will not suspect me of being beloved of Pattie until Pattie is mine own. And then he may please himself.'

This was the season of Ben Milner's annual holiday. He arrived at Kirkby, the nearest point to Topcliffe by railway, towards five o'clock of a glorious September afternoon, and the first person he came upon at the station was James Rufforth arriving there too, with a couple of dogs, and his gun in a case. James hailed Ben's appearance with rough cordiality.

'Milner, is that Milner? My dear fellow, I am glad to see you! Where are you going to put up?' cried he, shaking him by the hand warmly.

'At the Black Bull, or the Red Cow, or any convenient, hospitable shelter,' Ben replied, with reciprocal good-humour.

'Better come to Brackenbrow with me. I can give you a day's shooting. I suppose you have run down from town for a taste of mountain air?' James said. 'I shall be uncommonly pleased to have your company.'

Ben Milner accepted the invitation without demur. James looked as pleased as he said. A man in velveteen came forward, and relieved them of their baggage, and took charge of the dogs. Ben was in greater luck than he had expected. A day's shooting was a rare pleasure to him now, and not to be despised or denied. Perhaps he had other thoughts in his mind too—hopes of being useful to his entertainer—not formulated yet, but shaping themselves by degrees imperceptibly. James was at his best, both in appearance and in humour.

They set off to walk to Brackenbrow, which proved to be a compact little house of four rooms, standing where four ways met in the midst of a fine expanse of purple heather. The windows looked west; and as a splendid sunset promised, when they had dined the young men walked towards it, until they gained a ridge commanding a vast prospect of the lower country, open and cultivated, and with the course of a great river winding through it in silver folds. James Rufforth had talked indefatigably thus far of everyday matters, newspaper gossip, old acquaintances; who was up in the world, and who down; and Ben had let him have his full swing, relieved rather than otherwise to find that his interests were so multifarious.

But come to the scaur, where there was a rustic seat placed for romantic contemplation, they rested, and were silent in view of the great outspread glory—silent for some time. Ben waited for James to speak first, and speak he did, at last, in a voice that implied a difficult confidence, very unlike his former manner. He

had been making up his mind to it all this while, and began anxiously:

'Did you stop at Monksburn, Milner, on your road? You are very thick with our friends at Monksburn.'

'I came straight through. I must pay Monksburn a visit in returning,' was Ben's wary answer.

'You will not see Pattie. They have spirited her away,' James continued.

'Poor little Pattie! That is hard upon her. Whose doing is it, Rufforth?'

'They say it is mine. You have heard of our engagement and rupture?' Ben nodded. James went on with insistance, but without excitement. 'Now what is your opinion, Milner, as a man of the world—was I in my right to hold her to her promise, or was I not? She did promise, you know—she does not deny that.'

'She has repented then? She is unwilling? An unwilling wife would be but a tasteless morsel, Rufforth: I should let her go. There

are other girls in the world for a captivating fellow like you.'

'Yes, yes, yes—deuce take 'em all! Deuce take 'em all but Molly!' James picked up a bit of flintstone lying at his foot, and tossed it down the scaur as if it were the sex that he reprobated.

'Ah, poor Molly! What a girl that was, Rufforth! What a bonny face, what a brave heart!' said Ben with genuine feeling. 'She belongs to the days when we were boys.'

'There never was her equal, Milner! I could have been a good man with Molly—I have been no great shakes since she threw me over. Not that I blame her, poor darling. But I would have married her, in spite of all and everything, if she would have let me.'

'Is it too late now, Rufforth?' Ben said, sympathetically.

'No. And that is what I shall do yet. I was with her yesterday. Her father cannot last much longer, and then she will be alone. Milner, when I look at Molly I know what

mothers feel who see their children die, and agonize to help them, and cannot!'

'But Molly is not like dying, is she?' Ben asked in his cool moderating voice.

James laughed: 'God bless her, no! If ever there was a back made for its burden hers was. And she has kept her beauty too. Pattie is a sweet primrose and a plucky little lass, but she is no more to compare with Molly than a primrose is to compare with a sun-flower. Let Langworthy take her, goose-necked tom-noddy that he is!' James at this conclusion was obliged to get up and stamp about to relieve his sensations.

Ben regarded him with the mild humour of a profound philosopher: 'That is right,' said he, 'let Langworthy take her, if she is agreeable. A sweet little plucky primrose is enough for some men's contentment, but not for yours, who can draw invidious comparisons between the modest merits of the primrose and the glowing charms of the sun-flower.'

'Don't chaff a poor fellow, Milner,' James remonstrated; but Ben's treatment of his case

encouraged him to unfold himself further. 'Honesty is gone out of fashion,' said he, shrugging his great shoulders. 'Once we prided ourselves on being men of our word, and when poor Clay broke faith he had to pay forfeit. His business was gone at once, and credit too. The connexion would have disgraced me—I felt it myself. Molly saw I felt it, and there was an end of me with her.'

'If it is any comfort to have fellowship in misfortune, Rufforth, I missed my Molly too,' Ben said, pensively.

'I know you did. But you were able to keep yourself in hand—I never could. I gave myself to the devil, and went downright mad. Pattie was witness of it. She told me that she had seen me beat my favourite setter, and then shoot her. I beat her in a blind rage, and when I saw the loving dumb sorrow of her eyes I shot her to rid myself of the reproach—And I have never lost sight of it—I feel like a murderer sometimes. But I was mad, quite mad.'

'We must give you a keeper, Rufforth;

certainly we must give you a keeper,' said Ben, with a good humour that was less spontaneous than his good humour in general. There was much selfish violence in James Rufforth's character, whatever plea he might have in extenuation of it, and Molly's noble patience and forbearance would not be likely to rust for want of using if she finally acquiesced in his constant desires.

'There is one satisfaction—concerning Molly I have done what I could,' James said by-and-by. 'I helped the boys out to Australia, and I have helped them since, and they are firm on their legs now. They will stay where they are. And as one and another of Clay's neighbours have died off I have stept into their shoes. Molly will soon have nobody but me. I think she'll pay me then, Milner.'

'She has never resented your aberrations in favour of other women?'

'She has not known much about them—perhaps she has known nothing. And I have never scrupled to deny any story that came to her ears until the last. It had become serious

with me; and when she asked me in the spring if it was true about Pattie Gardner, and that we were to be married, I told her it was. She wished we might be happy, and then she fell a-crying. Poor Molly! it was her own fault since she would not have me herself. She knows now that Pattie wants to be off her bargain.'

'Did she cry for that, Rufforth?'

'No; she laughed, and called me a bad bargain. So I told her she must buy me herself at her own price, since she had spoilt me for any other girl. It will vex my father and mother, it will make the town talk, but what care I! Molly has seen trouble, but trouble has not curdled her sweet, warm blood. Put her in my grand new house at Whinmoor and put her on fine feathers again, and she will be as fine a bird as any. You have not seen her for a long while have you, Milner?'

'Not for years,' Ben said.

'I wish you would call, if you stop at Burford. I am sure she would take it kindly. She had a book of yours that she was

reading yesterday—she said the tone was pleasant; it was like spending an hour in good company.'

'If you think it would please her or the old man, or if it would please yourself, Rufforth, I will go to Burford for the purpose. It is only twenty minutes by rail, and I might be three weeks in returning, even if I return that way at all. I may never be nearer than now. I mean to walk up to Hawes.'

'Then I shall be very glad if you will, Milner. It will give poor Molly a little confidence. She has been pining so long in the cold shade that she shrinks from coming out into the light again, and trembles at the notion of having to face the world. There are not many in the world to equal her!'

'If I intercede with Molly on your behalf you must promise to wring no more necks on Pattie's, and beg her father to release her from durance. I have a tenderness for Pattie, and cannot bear to think of her unhappy.'

'Oh, Pattie is not unhappy—she is too young and too good. She is a very nice little

girl; and as for Langworthy, she deserves better than Langworthy, who is one of the vainest fellows going. You set your cap at her, Milner; see whether she will have anything to say to you. Very hoity-toity she was with me indeed. You will hardly believe it, perhaps, but she never let me get the chance of a kiss—never once from first to last.'

Ben went off into a fit of laughter inexplicable to his friend, and thanked him for his obliging consideration. 'I'll tell Pattie what you say, and let you know the result in due time,' he said.

And then they sauntered back in the dusk to Brackenbrow.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE COLD SHADE.

BEN MILNER was not surprised when James Rufforth invited him to forego his shooting for half the day, and travel to Burford the following afternoon.

'We will have another morning amongst the grouse,' he said, impatient, but diffident. 'I want to hear your report of poor Molly, and how she seems to you. I can trust you, Milner. You know the world. And if you back us, my people may take it less hardly. They will not be kind to her at once—they will blame her, and say she has drawn me into it. If I might have my way I would have it soon. Her father may die any hour, and he may linger for months. That lingering life is

cruel to her, and worse to me. The old man should go with us to Whinmoor.'

Ben understood all this as his instructions. He had never gone on such a mission before, and could only prepare to be guided by what he might see and hear in the course of his visit. He found Mr. Clay's house in a district of the town that was fields ten years ago; a shabby, pebble-dashed tenement, left alone in an untended garden, amidst a labyrinth of cheap suburban terraces. His friends had put him there after his misfortunes, and had supported him since.

His first and great misfortune was living beyond his means, and failing with discredit. He underwent a rather long term of imprisonment for debt. During that period his two sons, just growing up, removed to a new world, where contumely need not follow them. His wife and daughter were left alone. It was a sad fall in the world for them. Mrs. Clay never got over it.

Molly held up her head for a little while, but soon she was beaten down too. She

was a large fair girl, with thick rippled hair like burnished bronze, a glorious complexion, and sweet womanly eyes. James Rufforth was proud of her, and passionately in love. They were to have been married before long, when Mr. Clay's disgrace happened and changed everything. James Rufforth's family treated it as a matter of course that the match must be broken. Molly did not see it in that light. She was deeply attached to James, and let herself believe in him as a deliverer out of their trouble. But a few harsh, true words from his lips, spoken when it was at the sorest, cut her to the heart, and nothing that he could say or do after availed to close the wound which others were interested to keep open. Mr. Clay came out of prison a broken man, mentally and morally abased. His wife died of that misery; but Molly was young, strong—she bowed her neck to the burden, and accepted her fate.

It was nearly eight years ago now, and long since James Rufforth had been forgiven, and had resumed his habits of intimacy with

Molly. She let him come and go for the sake of her father, who had not many friends in his adversity. Her life had been the brighter for his faithfulness, though she steadily refused to comply with his reiterated offers to marry her. He used to say that he would tire her out with his importunity; and though he had, or was reported to have, many flirtations by the way, he did constantly return to his first love, until that memorable day when Pattie Gardner, acting bridesmaid to her brother's bride, brought him into a captivity which Ben Milner was destined to share. If Pattie had consented to that hurried union for which James pressed, they would have had a life not over enviable. His passion was as slight as it was impetuous, and those tears of Molly's quenched it. But his word was engaged and his pride was involved; and still Molly was obdurate. For good luck, Pattie could be obdurate too.

The door was opened to Ben Milner by Molly herself. They both coloured with a self-consciousness arising from the same cause—the thought of James Rufforth.

'Come in and see my father,' Molly said, and let him pass by her in the narrow passage to the sitting-room door.

Mr. Clay was seated in an invalid chair by the window, which was open. He was dressed in a shawl-patterned wrapper, warm and handsome, wadded with red silk. There was nothing painful or displeasing in his aspect. His eyes were dim, his manner was vague, but his thin features, wrinkled clean skin, and silver hair and beard, made him look like a venerable picture. Molly followed her visitor, and intro-him to her father.

'It is Ben Milner—you recollect Ben Milner?' she said in the loud cheerful voice that was habitual to her in speaking to him. Mr. Clay gazed, but gave no sign of recognition. 'Never mind,' said Molly, turning to the young man. 'He forgets everybody now but James Rufforth. He did not know Mr. Gardner when last he called. He does not know you. But sit down—take James's chair.'

The words were spoken so simply that Ben

scarcely noticed them. James' chair was a structure of Spanish mahogany and morocco, very easy and commodious. He was evidently at home there. Molly seated herself on the couch beyond the table in the middle of the room—that was her place—and Ben Milner and she talked to each other as if they were alone. Mr. Clay seemed to watch them in a puzzled way, but he did not interrupt their conversation. They called each other Molly and Ben—that was their former custom—any new fashion would have made their position more strange. After the first moments Molly was composed, more so than Ben himself. He was touched, surprised, moved by what he saw. His recollection of Molly was of a lovely, laughing, singing, dancing girl, very much caressed, very much admired, very fond of admiration, a prize in love's lottery that James Rufforth had been very proud to win. And he had not been allowed to carry her home yet.

The lines of her beautiful figure were more liberal, and her countenance was more gracious

and thoughtful, but she was still herself in blitheness of heart and buoyancy of spirit. Restore her to prosperity, and she would be sweet Molly again, and lovelier than ever. The rose flush in her cheeks, the soft archness of her full lips, the mirthful light in her blue eyes, were present still. Molly had been for a little while very angry, very fierce and unhappy, but she was commended as having done right in letting James Rufforth go, when he would have been like wax in the hands of a selfish and exacting girl. She did more than let him go, she sent him about his business. He took all the pleasure and hope of her young life away with him, but the peace was left her that comes of pride and conscience obeyed and satisfied. Then she proved strong enough to do her duty, and she was not forsaken by such friends as Mrs. Gardner. After a time, a considerable time, James Rufforth was permitted to recover his footing as a friend of her family, and she had let him add many resources to her father's daily existence, and to her own too, because it was one way of pacifying his unreasonableness,

and of making him a little less unhappy than either he was or pretended to be. Ben Milner observed numerous tokens of a generous guardian about the room, and especially a good supply of literature.

Molly saw that he observed them, and said, 'James brings these things. If you know James, you know how difficult it is to say him nay,' and she blushed shyly.

'When next he asks for anything, Molly, I hope you will find it *impossible*,' was Ben's gravely meaning reply.

At this Molly turned away her face, not feigning to misunderstand him, and the warm wave of colour spread over her fair white throat. That was the sum and substance of what Ben Milner had wanted the opportunity to say, and having said it he began to feel that he had made his visit long enough. His departure was facilitated by the coming to the window of a respectable man who worked at a nursery-garden in the neighbourhood, and acted as Mr. Clay's attendant. This was one of James Rufforth's arrangements to spare his dear Molly.

There was a question whether the old gentleman was to go out for an hour in a wheeled chair; a stout servant-woman appeared to help in the discussion, and it was not settled in a moment.

'I will say good-bye to you now, Molly. I am in the way,' Ben said, and began to move.

'If you are going back to James, give my love to him,' Molly answered, as simply as she had spoken of James's chair.

'I'll not forget,' said Ben, and felt that his mission had been crowned with success.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNEXPECTED MEETINGS.

JAMES RUFFORTH met Ben Milner on the road up to Brackenbrow. He was in a fine fume of impatience, and said that he had looked for Ben back by an earlier train. Ben was very good-natured; he did not keep James in suspense. He told him how handsome Molly looked, and when inquired of what her dress was, he could not tell at once.

'For which very reason it must have been appropriate and neat,' said he, perceiving that James was anxious to know. 'I believe it was black—yes, it was black; and she had full muslin ruffles at her throat and wrists. I noticed that her hands were a fine healthy colour in contrast with the white.'

'Poor girl, her hands don't lie all the day

in her lap idle,' said James. 'And she was pleased to see you, Ben?'

'She soon forgot how long it was since we had met. Yes, I should say she was pleased. She is shy—but she has had a blessing in her happy nature. There is nothing pined or stinted about her, after all these years.'

'She is no more than five-and-twenty, Ben, remember. She was a bouncing lass at fifteen. She was not full seventeen when she was promised to me.'

'Was she not? She bade me give her love to you, James—but you have it always. I agree with you that restored to her former condition she will adorn it. One must love Molly, she's so simple, and so good.'

'Who is more likely to know that than I, who have seen her tried—tried as not one woman in a thousand is tried? But I will make up to her for it. I'll tell you, Milner, what I have determined to do. I'll get a special license, and carry it about in my pocket until I persuade her to step into the nearest church with me, and then I'll wait my time and

opportunity for removing her and her father to Whinmoor.'

'She will not be neglected long when you get her there, Rufforth. She has behaved so finely all through that she has kept some of her best friends. That good Mrs. Gardner is a host in herself.'

'And Pattie—Pattie told me to go back to Molly, and let her be—the soundest advice I ever got from woman, Ben. Little Pattie is a shrewd lass; I will say that for her, though she cold-shouldered me.'

'You are much obliged to her, Rufforth. You ought to do her a good turn now, and let her father know that she will be safe for you, if he will have her home again.'

'I'll tell him so if I see him in town to-morrow. I am afraid I cannot stay for the grouse, Ben. If you see Pattie before I do, give her a message from me. Ask her to let bye-gones be bye-gones, and to come to Whinmore and see Molly.'

The young men had a couple of hours'

shooting in the morning early; then James Rufforth took the train for Burford, and Ben Milner got a cast of four miles with a miller in his gig on the road to Topcliffe. When he parted with the miller he was directed to cross the moor diagonally, keeping certain white-headed posts on his left hand, and he would reach Topcliffe after a walk of less than a mile and a half. It was a cool, glowing morning, hot with sun and sweet with air stirring, when he plunged into the sea of heather. Ben was uncommonly happy. He was on his road to Pattie, and quite sure of his welcome though he came without warning. He was also happy in his reflections on business, and had good hopes of being able to satisfy Mr. Gardner that he could keep his daughter as comfortably as a reasonable young lady need wish to be kept, though she might have to ride with him in a hansom when any distance was too far to go on foot, and he could not promise her, even in their remotest future, a grander house than the Corner House, which was sufficient for himself. He cherished a private opinion that Pattie

would be contented to live in a cupboard with him, but he did not tell anybody that.

Pattie had come out after breakfast, with Bluff carrying a little basket with their dinner in it (their liberty was very elastic, capable of extension from dawn to dark now), and carrying herself a drawing-block and case of moist colours, 'Queen Mary' to read, that Ben had sent her by post, and a warm shawl to cover her during that afternoon siesta which was become a regular part of the routine of the long days, drowsy in the heat and sun of afternoon out of doors.

The course that Ben had been directed to take across the moor brought him straight into the line that Patty and Bluff had taken that morning. While he was still a long way off he saw a bit of vivid red that composed charmingly with the transparent ether and dusky landscape. The vivid red proved to be a handkerchief on an old woman's back, seated on the ground. The old woman was knitting when he came near enough to observe her operations, and she wore spectacles that did not

see from afar; for she did not detect the young man's approach until her companion, who was half hidden by a bilberry bush and a big stone, whispered in loud surprise and alarm, 'Bluff, here is somebody coming!' and she put her hat on again, which she had thrown off. This for appearance and propriety's sake.

'It'ull be th' ould coo 'maybe,' said Bluff, slumberously. In her native air she was re-learning her native tongue.

'No, Bluff, it is a *man*—it is a *gentleman*.' Pattie's voice thrilled with awe and wonder.

'Is it, my joy? There'll be no harm in him—let him come,' murmured the old woman, still quiescent.

'But, Bluff, I believe it is—yes, it is my own dear, darling—'

'Your father, honey?' and now Bluff waked up, and was alert.

'No, Bluff, *Ben!*' Pattie's little pot of water tumbled over; she dropped her brush full of ochre into a vista of clear blue sky.

Bluff looked over her spectacles, and discerned the figure of a young man all in grey,

in a wideawake, with a knapsack on his back, and his umbrella up to shade off the sun. 'Her "dear, darling, duck of a Ben,"—so it is,' soliloquised she. 'If you take my advice, joy, since he *is* here, you'll just be civil to him, and barely that.'

This was the first precept of how a maiden should comport herself towards a lover who has travelled two hundred miles to see her that Pattie had received. She had been left to the light of nature hitherto, and, according to James Rufforth's account, that had been sufficient for her guidance. Perhaps she did not hear Bluff's precept—certainly she did not heed it. Ben, when he spied her rising and coming to meet him, shut up his umbrella, and was met with a very sweet civility indeed.

'Variable mortals you women are! your kisses and tears are never far asunder,' said Ben tenderly, looking into her face when a few minutes were over.

'Oh, Ben, it has been so tedious—so wearily long—nearly four weeks. It seems an age! No one but Bluff to talk to, unless I choose to

talk to myself. And there is not much fun in that,' she pleaded. 'I am so glad you have come!'

'Pattie, your neck is scorched, the tip of your ear is carnation. All day out in the sun and the wind—you are a little heather-belle,' said he, contemplatively.

'Don't you like me so, Ben? Am I very brown? I wish I had worn a sun bonnet.' Pattie was quite sorrowful. Ben was driven to comfort her with compliments, and to vow that he loved her best every way, any way, just as she was, just as she happened to be. He had no reason to complain. His morning with the grouse had reddened him too, if that was of any consequence. The sun and wind on the Yorkshire moors are brisk artists, and make quick work of painting a face that arrives from the soft south air unveiled.

Ben sat down at Pattie's side, and gave an account of himself. Bluff relapsed into her somnolent state. A thousand murmurs, mingled, indefinable, were around them. The world was a very long way off, and they looked,

held hands, talked, or were silent. This might have gone on for an hour or rather more, when, amongst the many sounds, remote, confused, uncertain, there was the sound of two voices—voices that grew in nearness and distinctness, until they announced themselves as the unexpected voices of Aunt Jane and Mr. Gardner. Ben's face became expressive of attention.

Bluff roused herself once more. 'You are nicely caught, honeys!' said she, in an aside meant for her own ears; but Ben heard it, and Pattie heard it.

'Ben, dear, what shall we do?' she asked, in rosy consternation.

'Nothing, my sweet sweeting, so proper and pure—full, stedfast, stable, and demure,' said Ben, lapsing into poetry.

Mr. Gardner and Aunt Jane appeared in view. Mr. Gardner was carrying a basket, the fellow to Bluff's. Pattie ran to embrace her father with some undefined hope that Ben would get out of sight or hide himself somewhere. But Ben did not; he rose from his couch of heather, and challenged Mr. Gardner's

notice with as cool an equanimity as if the scene were a drawing-room in Kensington. Nor did Mr. Gardner seem beyond measure surprised.

'How long have you been here, Ben?' was his very natural inquiry.

'Ten minutes or so. I have been here five or ten minutes, Pattie?' said Ben, appealing to her.

'Yes; five or ten minutes, papa. He was just walking across the moor and he saw me,' was Pattie's ingenuous confession.

('Oh, you story-tellers!' thought Bluff. 'Five or ten minutes, indeed! He's been an hour if he's been one minute.')

'Is this the gentleman who is interesting in connection with roast pig?' Aunt Jane asked, with a loud abruptness that was very startling, and she stared at Ben.

Pattie had the brave presence of mind to answer 'Yes,' without any appendix.

Everybody was a little confounded. Aunt Jane said 'Hum'm'm,' reflectively, and required the basket from Mr. Gardner. It contained

more luncheon—bread, cheese, fruit. It was her own proposal to go and join Pattie on the moor.

'Let us sit down; this is a pleasant spot,' said Ben. 'Here is a nice soft stone, ma'am; I'll lay my plaid on it, if you are not partial to the cold ground.' He made himself as polite to Aunt Jane as if she were Phibs, and in much the same way; and Aunt Jane was so little used to attentions that she unbent one degree from her stiffness, and gave him the table-cloth to spread.

Meanwhile, Pattie hugged her father's arm, and made love in whispers to go home with him. Ben and Aunt Jane set out the lunch, and Bluff contributed apple-pasties and a bottle of milk from her basket. When the feast was displayed, Ben resettled himself by his dear Pattie with an air of suppressed spirits. Ease was not restored in a moment. Aunt Jane proceeded to dispense her hospitality, but nobody began to eat, and nobody spoke until Ben broke a bit off his own pasty, and offered it to Pattie's mouth, murmuring with tender,

furtive encouragement, '"Eat, pretty creature, eat!"'

Pattie drew back her head, blushing, laughing, replying with modest deprecation, 'Don't, Ben!'

Mr. Gardner pretended to discover bread and cheese, and to want some very much; and Aunt Jane, whose teeth were excellent, appropriated a crust, burnt, that was not likely to find another consumer. Whether Ben fed Pattie, or Pattie fed Ben, no one condescended to notice any more. They were treated as having affronted the company—by not behaving themselves before folks, as Bluff told her 'joy' afterwards. Pattie pleaded that it was Ben's fault, who ought to have known better; for did he not live in London and in good society? but his country manners were not yet improved away altogether, she supposed. However, she would tell mamma.

After they had done luncheon they conversed a little, Mr. Gardner often consulting his watch. At length, he said, 'We must be going, Aunt Jane. Puss can leave her things for

Bluff to bring by the carrier's cart on Saturday.'

Then Pattie knew that her father had come to carry her home; but her gladness did not break into expression, because Aunt Jane had really been very good in her way.

'You are going to walk up to Hawes,' Mr. Gardner continued, turning to Ben. 'James Rufforth gave me my information. I advise you to set your face north-west, and you will get to Hawes some day.'

Ben did not want this advice. Topcliffe lay south: Monksburn more south. Pattie's meek expostulation was uttered in a sigh. 'I'll step along to the village with you, and see you off, sir. Time does not stand in my way,' Ben said, his assurance routed but for an instant.

When they came to Aunt Jane's house, it was indispensable in that half-civilised country that the young man should be invited to walk into the parlour. At three o'clock punctually the dog-cart that had brought Mr. Gardner from Kirkby arrived at the door to carry him back. Pattie remarked that there was room to

have taken Bluff and her things; upon which Ben with sudden alacrity proposed to ask for a cast to Kirkby himself. Topcliffe was not the best point he might have chosen as a start on his pedestrian tour, and he thought he would get back to Burford. Mr. Gardner looked impenetrably deep, and made Ben no answer. Aunt Jane stood by, very happy to part with her visitors, but feeling for the young people uncommonly.

'Nephew, all this is in haste, but it need not be in a hurry,' said she, laying a hand on his arm. 'Just speak to me a moment. I want a few words with you.'

Mr. Gardner stepped aside with his aunt, and was absent ten minutes. His visage was inscrutable when he reappeared, and he had nothing to say. Pattie and Ben were discoursing at the gate, and moved to open it when he came down the path. He did not seem to see Ben, but to Pattie he said, 'Up with you, Pattie,' indicating the seat that she was to occupy with himself. She gazed wistfully behind at her faithful lover, but her father

made no sign of acceding to his reasonable request. Ben looked many things, but he asked none.

'Good-bye, Aunt Jane,' said Pattie from her elevation. Her accent was serenely sad, resigned.

Mr. Gardner got up beside his daughter. The ostler let the horse's head go. It sprang forward, and Ben Milner was left standing in the road—from the air and attitude of him, quite amazed and wonderstruck by his position. A minute, and Pattie looked round. Ben still stood in the road, alone. Mr. Gardner glanced down in his daughter's face. She was startled and dismayed. Her eyebrows were raised, her pretty mouth was fallen.

'What is the matter, Pattie?' her father's natural feeling betrayed him into asking.

'Aunt Jane has gone in, and shut the door, and you have driven off without so much as "Good morning" to Ben. His holiday will not profit him much if this is to be the beginning. If he were to write and say he would rather not marry into such a disagreeable

family, it would not be surprising.' Mr. Gardner glanced at his daughter again, to see if she were in earnest. She was pouting at the horizon with much dignity. 'You would not have thanked anybody who made you look ridiculous before mamma, would you, papa?' she asked in a tone of appeal.

'It was not necessary to thank anybody, Puss; I made myself look ridiculous enough without assistance,' her father rejoined. And he drove steadily on to Kirkby station.

Poor Pattie descended from the heights of her resentment before she arrived at Monksburn. She was an acceptable surprise to her mother, who had no expectation of seeing her. Mr. Gardner soon explained her appearance. He had met with James Rufforth on arriving in town, and after a little chat with him, had found the temptation of running over to Topcliffe irresistible. And once there, he could not leave Pattie behind him; so here she was. And he hoped now she would be a good girl, and not want sending from home again.

Pattie's eyes and her mother's met, and they went upstairs together. 'Yes, love, I understand. You are less to blame than any of us. But never mind,' said her mother, soothingly. 'Nothing is ever gained by convincing men they are in the wrong. They don't like it.'

Pattie was comforted in a degree, but the joy she would have felt in coming home was overshadowed by the cavalier usage Ben had experienced. And all the evening she could not help but think of his disappointment, and the grotesque pantomime by which he intimated the same to her as she was borne away.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. GARDNER HEARS REASON.

NEVERTHELESS Pattie's mother was able to tell her in the morning that she looked as blithe as she was blooming, and that it was a most true pleasure to have her about the house again.

'I should not look so blithe, mamma, but that I have perfect faith in Ben,' Pattie replied with very proper feeling.

The post is a swift pursuer. Mr. Gardner had run away from Ben Milner with his daughter, but the moment they were out of sight Ben despatched letters after them. Mr. Gardner had his to breakfast. That over, he gave it to his wife, and they discussed it in private. Mrs. Gardner perused the document with much sympathy for the writer. To snatch Pattie

away when he had travelled from London to see her, and had seen her but for a moment, was very harsh and severe, and Pattie had behaved beautifully. That was her mother's opinion.

'I will tell you what it is, my dear,' she said in a persuasive voice. 'I will tell you what it is. You want to marry Pattie next door, not to lose her ourselves. I should like to keep her near us too, for she is but a tender, young thing; but we cannot expect to rule all as we might wish. I am more relieved than tongue can tell that she is not to marry James Rufforth; and I should be sadly mortified to see her bestowed on poor Langworthy—she will not let herself be bestowed either without her own consent. What have you against Ben Milner? You were partial enough to him before this happened. I could trust the sweet child to him. He is indulgent, and very fond of her.'

Mr. Gardner was at a loss for arguments. He did not want to part with Pattie—he did not want her to go so far off as London—these

were his secret sentiments. 'I wish the matter to rest as it is for the present,' said he aloud. 'She will have peace from James Rufforth; and if her aversion to Langworthy is real, let him go too. Ben Milner is a little bit presuming. He is a pleasant fellow and good-looking, but there is a considerable disparity of age between them, and he cannot afford Pattie the luxuries and comforts that she has been brought up with.'

'They are not necessary to her. She bore roughing it with Aunt Jane very well. And as for the disparity of age, Ben Milner is not so old as James Rufforth, and will be young all his life, with his turn for fun. He is very affectionate too; as a mother I cannot help liking him. All I want is to see my dear little Pattie happy; and her heart is set on Ben.'

'Aunt Jane is going to give her five thousand pounds. What has Ben done to deserve that luck?'

'Oh, my dear, what good news! That will smooth over the only difficulty that was a

difficulty!' cried Mrs. Gardner with great thankfulness. 'I have not quite approved of Ben's profession as an author—writing is hand-to-mouth work, and often more praise than pudding—but with what you have laid by to give her too, there will be a little something to fall back on.'

'I have not heard that Ben means to give up his clerkship; and his profession, steadily followed, is not a bad profession now-a-days. He will value Pattie none the less for a few obstacles in his path. Just let him wait.'

Mrs. Gardner held her peace at this, and told Pattie presently all that her father had said. Pattie wrote kindly to Ben; and Ben walked up to Hawes in quest of health, strength, spirits, and any ideas that might be thrown into the bargain. Meanwhile, the days went on to the time of night-frosts and falling leaves, and autumnal winds. The garden at Monksburn began to look bare, and the broad border under the fruit-tree wall was encumbered with dank brown drift of

dying things. Pattie might have repined, perhaps, but nature was against her, and she had not much to repine for, when all was said. She took to fresh and stirring occupations. Miss Phœbe told her how the ladies in town were attending schools of cookery, and new beginners were sent into the scullery to learn to clean kitchen ranges and pots and pans. Upon this hint Pattie apprenticed herself to Hannah downstairs; and might be seen on certain mornings equipped in printed calico, short in the skirt and sleeves, with a capacious bibbed apron on, and a Normandy cap that completely enclosed and covered her hair. No one could imagine how pretty Pattie looked playing kitchen-maid, who had not seen her. She turned out so clever at dainty dishes that Hannah said she had a real *genus* for the h'art of cookery, which might be known by whether folks liked things nice to eat or not, and that Miss Pattie did from a baby, bless her! and know'd things good as well as the best of 'em. Pattie laughed at this testimony to her cultivated taste, and did not deny it. Then her

mamma let her hold the keys. Domestic employments amused her more just now than French and German, and playing the piano.

And she found mental entertainment in reading dear Ben's books and articles that he had written, and discovered him to be so much wiser and more eloquent in print than in actual life that she was rather glad she had loved him before she knew his profundity. 'I am afraid you are sarcastic,' she wrote to him. Ben wrote back: 'So are you, my Pat-a-cake.'

Pattie's eighteenth birthday was on the twenty-fifth of October. Some time before the event, while Ben was still in the North, Mrs. Gardner inquired of her husband how it was to be kept. 'Eighteen is a girl's coming of age, my dear, and we ought to give her a dance. But I am quite sure Pattie will have no heart for dancing unless Ben Milner is here,' said her mother. 'Is he to be invited?'

'A dance! What do you want to turn the house upside down for at this time of year?

Let dancing wait till Christmas,' was Mr. Gardner's pettish reply. 'And as for Ben Milner—you are in a great hurry to get your daughter married.'

'Very well, my dear. But Pattie will never have another eighteenth birthday,' said her mother with expostulatory caution.

Mr. Gardner had worked himself into a notion that he was defied and disrespected by his beloved Puss, and that her wilful will ought to be restrained. Nevertheless, being indulgent to women because of their weakness (of which their wilfulness was a part), and generous of gifts even to the undeserving, he said he would make Pattie a nice present to remember the day by, and he hoped she would be contented with that.

With this intention, the next time she came in his way alone he called her to him, put an arm round her, and looked in her face to see what she was thinking of. They had been rather reserved each to the other during late days. Something in Pattie's expression seemed new. She wore a thoughtful air. Mr.

Gardner realised that love had taught her to put away childish things, and made her much more of a woman than she was when she went to London six months ago. She happened to have a bit of straw in her fingers when her father called her, and as he studied her countenance and considered how he should speak to her, she began to draw patterns on his kind mild visage. She had done it before—he seated, and she standing within his arm to be lectured. It was the pattern of dear Ben's moustache that she delineated now on her father's clean shaven upper lip. It tickled, and he gently imprisoned her hand.

'Pattie, I wish you to listen to me. It is necessary that I should speak to you very firmly,' he begun. This was not at all what he had meant to say. To reason with Pattie was to be lost. He had proved it before—but there was a fate in it.

'Yes, papa, I am attending,' she told him, standing as still as a mouse.

'It is a very solemn thing to be a man's

wife, Pattie. Your mother has warned you of that, perhaps?'

'No, papa. I found it out for myself in the melancholy prospect of being James Rufforth's. I am so glad he has taken Molly Clay. They are positively *married.*'

'And you will see that he will make her an excellent husband.'

'Because he loves her, and she understands him. He would soon have been very hard to me, papa. It was the misery of losing her, and being bound to me—and the fuss to get the worse over that upset him. Mrs. Rufforth told me so; but this is a sort of secret. James was persuaded to go and stay with Dr. Williams while I was at Topcliffe, and he got quite well. Bye-gones are to be bye-gones about all that, papa, and I want to forget it. But have I not had an escape?'

Mr. Gardner almost succumbed under this *douche* of feminine common sense. 'You know more about James a great deal than I do, Pattie. Mrs. Rufforth ought not to have spoken to you,' said her father.

'It was to excuse him, papa. She does not believe that he bought any furniture in Paris—it is very unlikely—or that he ever went near the Isle of Wight. He was very odd and random all the time he was away. But that is of no consequence now to me. I wish we had never been engaged.'

'That brings me to the point, Pattie. When you think how easily you were prevailed on to accept his offer of marriage, it ought to make you cautious for the future.'

'Prevailed on, papa dear, not by his merits, but by *your* strong recommendation,' Pattie whispered, tickling him with that straw.

'Puss, I was going to say that you must not do it again. You must know your own mind before you let it go abroad that you are engaged to marry this man or that, or you will be called a jilt.'

'Dear papa, I *will* be true to Ben.' Pattie made this asseveration with the earnest feeling of a child promising to be good, under instant fear of a whipping: 'I *will* be true to Ben, believe me.'

Mr. Gardner looked down, quite posed by her audacity in venturing so much as to mention Ben. 'Go to your mother, Puss: I can do nothing with you. No, stop a minute. What would you like me to give you on your birthday? Your mother professes that it is an important era, and will never come again.'

'Am I to choose, pap a '

'Yes. But let it be something reasonable, and that will not wear out.'

'Then, papa dear, I'll have a party. That will be both reasonable and seasonable; and pleasing recollections never wear out. Will you open the ball with me, papa? Please say, "I shall be most happy."'

'I shall be most happy, Puss,' sighed the poor father, taken in his own net. His countenance was quite dolorous. Pattie sketched smiles about his mouth with the straw, and promised him that he would enjoy the dance as much as anybody. 'Who is to stand up with your mother, Puss?' he asked, beginning to melt fast.

'Ben will be so obliging. Shall I write and ask him?'

'If the truth were known, I daresay you have done it already, Pattie.'

'No, *indeed*, papa! But mamma has ordered lots of things for supper.'

'Ah! I thought you were in a league. Where may Ben Milner be just now?'

'He *may* be at Burford before evening, papa. He *might* be at Monksburn, if you called at "The Lion," and brought him over with you. To-morrow he must be in London.'

Mr. Gardner kissed Pattie, and went to town; leaving her to wonder and doubt all day whether he would be *good.*

'I think he will, my love. Don't distress yourself,' said her mother, and Pattie lived in hope.

CHAPTER XXI.

PATTIE'S BIRTHDAY BALL.

Two or three people were coming to dine at Monksburn that evening, Jem Gardner and his young wife amongst them. This gave Pattie an excuse for arraying herself in her bridesmaid's dress with the lovely bodice that Ben admired. Then she went and watched at the staircase window for his arrival with her father. But her father arrived alone. That was too much for her tender heart. She retired into her room, and shut herself up under the heavy disappointment. Jem's wife came to her there with small talk, and diverted her sorrow in some degree, but Pattie was sadly serious.

'Poor old Mr. Clay died this morning, so you will not have the James Rufforths at your

birthday party,' her sister told her. 'I daresay that will not spoil your pleasure.'

'Not at all,' said Pattie, with a lingering sigh.

'That is a sweet dress, Pattie; but why have you put it on to-night? Is it not to do for your dance?'

'Yes. I put it on because I like it.'

The door opened and Mrs. Gardner, without her cap and only half dressed, looked in. 'Pattie, my love, what are you dreaming of? Don't you know that Ben Milner is here?' said she in her soft, motherly voice.

'He did not come with papa. Where is he?' Pattie asked, and moved to the door.

'Not in the drawing-room: in the little parlour you will find him,' said her mother. And Pattie vanished, a picture of happiness. Ben Milner must have been very pleased to see her, and indeed, he made her feel he was.

It was cunning of the pair to enter by different doors, and almost simultaneously, when they joined the company.

'Why so smart, Pattie?' asked her brother, greeting her fraternally. 'Is Langworthy to be here?'

Pattie said, not that she knew of; but she seemed so wonderfully shy that Jem, who had heard nothing of Ben Milner, immediately suspected a lover somewhere. Ben had a proud conscious air too, and was as brown as a gipsy in his fine linen and dress suit. Miss Phœbe would have said he looked beautiful; and if she had asked Pattie, Pattie would have agreed with her.

It was a most delightful evening. There was so large a fire in the drawing-room that it necessitated the opening of the curtains and the conservatory door, and anyone could go there who preferred the scented green coolness and twilight to the broad lustre of gas, whist, and music. Ben and Pattie did. And Pattie said it was lovely to be happy with Ben, and not even papa sorry. Mr. Gardner was, in fact, very civil to Ben—cordial, indeed. He had always approved the young man—his character, disposition, and person—but to give him Pattie

had been a very great request. However, since Pattie desired no better, and her mother was satisfied, and six months of discouragement had not availed to change either of their minds, he wisely decided that he must give her up, and let her go.

But what the concession cost him only himself knew. Pattie was the only girl of seven children. 'We shall see her once a year at Monksburn, and we may go to London once. Why was not another of the lads a lass, wife?' he said to her mother.

'Ah! that is one of the things I never could understand,' replied she, half amused. 'Six boys to our share and but one little girl; and to my sister Ruth's four girls and never a boy at all. What they would give for a son! It is the perversity that is in the nature of things, I expect. And as we cannot alter it we must leave it.'

Ben Milner had to go to London the next day, but he went under a promise to return with Phibs for Pattie's birthday party. Aunt

Jane was asked too, and being told that the young man would be there who hoped to be the ultimate owner of Pattie and her pocket with five thousand pounds in it, she said she would come—if the truth must be told, to the general dismay of the family. Mr. Gardner thought it was a pity they had pressed her; and Mrs. Gardner was uneasy as to what she would be pleased to wear on the occasion, without daring to offer any advice.

'Whatever she wears I shall be nice to her,' announced Pattie. 'She was good to me, and is going to be better; and if she would like to dance Ben shall dance with her. Papa, was Aunt Jane ever a girl like me?'

'I do not remember her as a girl, Puss; but she was a handsome young woman I have heard, and she had a high temper. She married to please herself—as you are going to do—but her husband died before she was five-and-twenty, and left a very queer will. There was over a thousand a year for her as long as she remained a widow, but if she married again every penny of his money was to go to his

brother's family. Jane had a little of her own, enough to starve on, and she threw all else overboard and elected to starve. I daresay she fancied she was acting finely, but most people called her a fool. Of course, her husband's relations were much obliged to her. On the whole, I should not wonder if she has been as happy, saving and starving at Topcliffe, as she would have been living in clover at Mayfield. And you ought to be grateful, Pattie, who are to reap the benefit.'

Pattie was very grateful, and forgot that ever Aunt Jane had offended. She might have laughed, but she would have been touched too, if she had seen her, watched by Martha in her spectacles, turning over the indestructible treasures that remained to her from her gaudy days—old-fashioned trinkets, and plate almost black with lying by. She wondered whether Pattie would care for them. She had thought them rich gifts when the hand that gave them was warm with life, but they had waxed poor when the giver proved distrustful of her affection. They were all trash to her now. Yet

not trash that she could wish to turn into money.

'We will pack them up again in the strong-box, and send them by the carrier to Jones,' the silversmith at Burford,' said she, tiring of the task soon. 'Pattie can go there and see them, and can exchange what she does not care to keep.'

Pattie got this letter from Topcliffe the next day.

'Dear Pattie,—I have sent to Jones', the silversmith, the plate that was my husband's and mine, for which I shall never have any more use. It is at your service. And there are some ornaments—the pearls are, perhaps, spoilt. There is a little parcel in the box. That is my cookery-book, noted at the dishes that I have proved to be good. Always use French brandy, fry in sweet butter, and if you must have jelly, have none but calves' foot.

'Your attached

'AUNT JANE.

'P.S.—Indeed, little Pattie, I do love you.

It is a moot point whether apple-sauce, or bread-sauce with currants in it, is best with roast-pig. Consult the gentleman's taste. I advise apple-sauce—good sharp apples—and a bit of butter stirred in it, with fine sifted sugar.'

It is a fact that Aunt Jane was the grandest figure at Pattie's birthday ball. She had brought out a gown of black satin, rich enough to stand of itself. The gored skirt, very tight before and full and trained behind, was in the mode of to-day. She had lived the fashions round, and round and round again—and an antiquated fichu of Brussels lace covered and completed the deficiencies of the bodice. With her black eyes, white hair, erect stature, and fine frowning features, she made a picture. Mr. Pensill, the little artist gentleman, who was a neighbour and favourite at the Corner House, and who had come down with Ben Milner and Miss Phœbe, was quite captivated, and did little else but intrigue to get the old lady to sit for her portrait.

Miss Phœbe and Aunt Jane took to each other on the spot, and discovered mines of recollections in common. Neither was prevailed on to dance, but Pattie's father stood up with her, and Ben with her mother—just for one country-dance, no more; then the young people had everything their own way, and did as they pleased.

Before the evening was quite over somebody who had nothing to do but look on took Pattie by the arm, and whispered: 'I have found you out, Miss Pattie. It was Ben Milner who put James Rufforth's nose out of joint—eh? When is it to be?'

That was the only question left to settle when Ben quitted Monksburn after the ball—when he was to come back for Pattie, and carry her away for good. Mr. Gardner said there was no hurry; but her girl-friends look forward to wearing their bridesmaid's dresses for her at their Christmas festivities; and Miss Phœbe has told Mrs. Nowse, next door, that she believes dear Ben will spend part of the winter in the south of France, and that he will have a companion—dear Pattie, in fact.

And Miss Phœbe is not to be turned out—no—she is to stay at the Corner House: Pattie is glad that she should stay, and Ben is sure that they will be happier together than apart. Pattie is a country girl, and will want putting in the way of many things, and she will want company in the days of Ben's long absences. At all events, they are going to try it.

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